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Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7951st meeting
Thursday, 25 May 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Nin Novoa/Mr. Bermúdez/Mrs. Nuñez	(Uruguay)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Takei
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni
	Ukraine	Mr. Kyslytsya
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict

Letter dated 26 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2017/365)

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2017/414)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict

Letter dated 26 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2017/365)

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2017/414)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, the ministers and other distinguished representatives present at today's meeting. Their participation here today is an affirmation of the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

I wish to congratulate the Republic of Argentina because today, 25 May, marks its day of independence.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte D'Ivoire, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following to participate in this meeting: Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Eduardo Fernández Zincke, Counsellor and Head of the Humanitarian Affairs Section of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/365, which contains a letter dated 26 April from the Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I wish to also draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/414, the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to address the critical issue of protection of civilians in armed conflict.

During my 10 years as High Commissioner for Refugees, I saw the tragic results of our failure to protect civilians caught up in conflict in the refugee camps and the settlements that I visited all over the world. I heard countless horrific stories and met many of the women and girls, men and boys who fled for their lives. Their suffering is incalculable and represents wasted human potential.

But despite our efforts, civilians continue to bear the brunt of conflict around the world. In Syria, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry has documented relentless attacks and sieges that show no signs of abating. In South Sudan, horrendous abuses continue as parties to the conflict target civilians, including aid workers. In Yemen, civilians are trapped and targeted by all sides. Attacks against humanitarian personnel and supplies continue putting national staff at particular risk. The deliberate denial of access to aid and the abuse of bureaucratic restrictions are becoming more prevalent in conflict zones. Suffering is pushed to unbearable limits when civilians are deprived of food

and health care in sieges that can last months or in some cases years.

Cities like Aleppo, Juba and Mosul have become death traps, while the destruction of housing, schools, markets, hospitals and vital infrastructure will affect generations to come. Attacks on hospitals and medical staff and the removal of medical supplies from humanitarian convoys are symptoms of a continued grave disregard for international law and the protection of civilians. Endemic sexual violence, including rape, abduction, human trafficking, sexual slavery and forced marriages, contributes to the disproportionate suffering of women and girls in conflict. Women are particularly at risk in urban warfare, during house searches and operations in residential areas, and at checkpoints.

This brutality has forced unprecedented numbers of civilians to flee in search of safety. More than 65 million people are displaced by conflict, violence and persecution worldwide — two-thirds of them within their own countries. These unrelenting attacks on civilians, coupled with a lack of access to aid, are also playing a major role in creating conflict-driven famines that threaten 20 million people in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

One year ago, the Security Council took specific action to improve the protection of medical care during conflict by adopting resolution 2286 (2016). In August, my predecessor submitted recommendations, which I fully endorse, for the swift implementation of the resolution by Member States and other parties to conflict. These developments created hope for an improvement in the lives of millions of people affected by war and violence.

But on the ground, little has changed. Attacks against medical workers and facilities continue and no one is spared. According to the World Health Organization, attacks on medical facilities — including hospitals, doctors and ambulances — and on the wounded and the sick took place in at least 20 countries affected by conflict in 2016. In most of these places, fragile medical systems were already at the breaking point as staff struggled to treat huge numbers of people. In most cases, no one was held accountable.

In Syria, Physicians for Human Rights has documented more than 400 attacks on medical facilities since the conflict began. More than 800 medical staff have been killed. In Yemen, just a few months after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), 15 people, including 3 medical staff, were reported killed when a hospital was hit in an airstrike — even though the roof of the building was clearly marked and the GPS coordinates had been shared with all parties. In Afghanistan, the number of reported attacks against health facilities and personnel almost doubled in 2016 compared with 2015.

These attacks are evidence of a broader trend. Parties to conflict are treating hospitals and health clinics as targets rather than respecting them as sanctuaries. This goes against the spirit of the Geneva Conventions, the fundamental tenets of international humanitarian law and our basic humanity. These attacks not only cause immediate suffering to patients, medical workers and their families; they also deprive entire communities of essential health care, making them uninhabitable and contributing to the global displacement crisis. In Syria, more than half of all medical facilities are closed or are only partially functioning, and two-thirds of specialized medical personnel have fled the country. In South Sudan, after years of attacks on medical facilities, fewer than 50 per cent are functional in areas affected by conflict. This severely restricts the services they can provide.

Resolution 2286 (2016) and the Secretary-General's recommendations provide an important platform for enhancing respect for the norms of international humanitarian law. What is needed now is action that will turn these words into reality.

There has been some progress. Switzerland and Canada have gathered an informal group of States to support the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016). Several Member States are in the process of reviewing their domestic laws and policies to strengthen implementation. In some conflict zones, parties to conflict and national authorities are discussing deconfliction arrangements and making credible efforts to investigate incidents.

The United Nations, for its part, is improving data collection so we can understand patterns and work to change them. The World Health Organization is consolidating and sharing information on attacks that obstruct access to medical care. I welcome these efforts and thank the civil society organizations that have played such an important role in driving them. I urge all to use these as a basis for progress.

More broadly, there are three clear ways to improve the protection of civilians in armed conflict:

First, we must ensure greater respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. I urge parties to conflict to take concrete steps to limit harm to civilians in their military operations, as they are obliged to do under international law, and I call on all Member States to use their influence to promote respect for international law and ensure accountability for violations. I urge those engaged in arms transfers to show greater responsibility and consider the potential consequences of those sales for human lives and for our common security. And I call on all to support international accountability mechanisms that complement national efforts, including the International Criminal Court.

Secondly, we must step up the protection of humanitarian and medical missions by implementing my predecessor's recommendations on resolution 2286 (2016). Many of these measures can and should be extended to protect other humanitarian actors and all civilians. We must also prioritize the protection of civilians in United Nations peace operations and ensure that missions have the capacity to deliver their mandates. The Security Council has a central role to play here. I call on all Member States to endorse the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians as an urgent priority.

Thirdly, we must do more to prevent forced displacement and find durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people. We need a strong and comprehensive agreement to re-establish the integrity of the international refugee protection regime, in line with international refugee law, and we must commit to action on the plight of the internally displaced. We must also tackle the causes of displacement. That means addressing the root causes of conflicts by investing in inclusive and sustainable development; promoting all human rights — civil, political, economic, social and cultural — and the rule of law; strengthening governance and institutions; and enhancing mediation capacity, from communities to national Governments.

No one is winning today's wars; everyone is losing. I appeal to all leaders, parties to conflict and those with influence to bring these raging conflicts to an end and to do all in their power to prevent new ones from erupting. Preventing and ending conflict is my first priority as Secretary-General. I call on all to make it theirs, for the sake of the millions of civilians who are suffering around the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Beerli.

Ms. Beerli (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great pleasure for me to speak here on behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

(*spoke in English*)

It is a particular pleasure to speak alongside the new Secretary-General as he presents his first report (S/2017/414) on this subject. The ICRC greatly appreciates the strategic focus and energy that the Secretary-General brings to the critical questions of how to prevent and alleviate the suffering of civilians in armed conflict.

My statement today shall focus on three areas: the strategy in the Secretary-General's report; progress in the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016); and our particular concern for a group that is often forgotten — missing persons and their families.

Hayat; Ahmed; Samia — these are the names of some of the children that ICRC hospitals have treated recently. Our doctors helped to fit them with prosthetic aids after their limbs were blown off during attacks. Hayat was just three-years-old when an air strike destroyed her house, killing her sister and leaving her severely injured. As we meet today, I ask everyone to remember their names and the cruel hand dealt to them in the early years of their lives.

At the ICRC, we see the daily realities of what happens when civilian populations are not protected during conflict and other situations of violence. There are millions of people living in desperate and terrifying places, and there is no matter more urgent than their protection. The Secretary-General stresses that urgency in his report, which states that today the world faces a protection crisis of the highest order because of armed conflicts.

The ICRC endorses the three priorities of protection in the report and supports the call to focus on the particular challenges of urban warfare. The return of armed conflict to towns and cities has been a particular concern of the ICRC in recent years. Approximately 50 million people in urban areas now bear the brunt of conflict. The overwhelming percentage of people killed or injured by explosive weapons in populated areas are civilians. They are mothers, fathers and children who

are not part of the fighting and simply wish to lead their lives, not fear for them.

The ICRC advocates that all parties should avoid using explosive weapons that have a wide-impact area in populated places. In addition to the high risk of indiscriminate civilian death and injury, heavy explosive weapons can cause extensive damage to critical infrastructure, such as health care, water and electricity facilities. Critically, under international humanitarian law, civilians must not only be protected from attack and the impact of conflict, but also be able to go about their daily lives, but too often we see the fabric of communities being eroded. Children are unable to attend school. The sick cannot reach hospitals, and livelihoods are interrupted or cease entirely. When people live in fear and cannot safely continue their activities, they risk becoming marginalized, destitute and reliant on humanitarian aid.

Returning to the report, we warmly welcome the Secretary-General's priority of prevention as an important part of his Office and the mandate of the Council. We agree that strengthening respect for international law is a prerequisite for halting the brutal violations that are driving endless cycles of violence. We urge the Council to continue to demand and encourage respect for international humanitarian law as the most immediate form of prevention. Preventing violations can instantly protect civilians on the ground and strengthen peacebuilding in the long-term.

The Secretary-General's report correctly aligns respect for international law with good practices by parties to the conflict, especially in military partnerships. Today's armed conflicts are increasingly fought in alliances and coalitions, which develop partnered operations. Those partnerships may involve States' training, equipping and advising other States or non-State armed groups in armed conflicts. We urge the Council to remind all parties to armed conflict that Common Article 1 to the four Geneva Conventions requires them "to respect and ensure respect for the Conventions in all circumstances".

Good practices are equally important in States' counter-terrorism activities amounting to armed conflict. The violations committed by the enemy must not result in the lowering of standards by States, which are still obliged to respect international humanitarian law. The law is vital and can help parties find practical solutions to humanitarian problems. In this fortieth anniversary year of the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention of 1977, the ICRC urges all States to recognize the positive impact that those particular rules make on the conduct of hostilities and reaffirm their very practical relevance to today's armed conflicts.

One year after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), the Secretary-General's report clearly shows how the obstruction of access to, attacks and threats against health care remain at an extremely high level. We are not only seeing health workers killed or threatened, hospitals destroyed and ambulances denied access, but entire public health systems collapse. Communities are exposed to renewed epidemics, thereby compounding existing humanitarian catastrophes and causing long-term setbacks in the areas of public health and development. It happens in many places, but most recently in Yemen we have seen a deadly cholera outbreak, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of people just in the past few weeks. Much more needs to be done to stop violence against health care, which is carried out by States as well as non-State armed groups. Several States have nevertheless made progress in improving their domestic legislation to protect health care and enhance their military policy and rules of engagement. Other States are developing diplomatic networks to build increasing support for resolution 2286 (2016).

Further action in two areas will make a practical difference.

First, States need to gather data on why attacks happen. Attacks can be direct, but they can also be the result of inadequate precautions to identify the location of facilities or an insufficient appreciation of the humanitarian consequences of military operations. They also result from an ignorance about the rules applying to health care or inadequate training. If there is a better understanding about why attacks happen, then authorities can take steps to stop them.

Secondly, States must focus much more on the behaviour and attitudes of weapons-bearers, on respecting international humanitarian law and on increasing accountability for those who carry out attacks against health care. We need more organized exchanges on best practices so as to improve the passive protection of facilities and patients and on changing knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in weapons bearers. There is an urgent need to implement the recommendations made by the Secretary-General and others, including

the Health Care in Danger project, an initiative of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Debates like this one can play a part, as well as States' voluntarily reporting on their efforts to implement resolution 2286 (2016), but to influence behaviour on the ground, our work also needs to continue at the national and regional levels. We urge all parties to armed conflicts to issue specific military procedures so that health care systems are protected from attacks, threats and other violence, and that those supporting other parties to armed conflicts exert their maximum influence to ensure that their allies do the same.

Finally, the ICRC was very pleased to see mentioned in the report the plight of missing persons and their families. That humanitarian challenge has been overlooked on the global humanitarian agenda for too long. Right now, we are seeing a new spike in the numbers of missing persons in armed conflicts. Last year, tens of thousands of families experienced the profound pain of not knowing the fate of their loved ones. Whether a person is unaccounted for after an attack because they were abducted, displaced or because their remains were buried in haste, their family is left waiting. It remains an open wound, which can last a lifetime. Under international humanitarian law, parties to the conflict must both prevent people from going missing and clarify the fate of those who do.

We urge the Council to encourage all States and parties to conflict to take early action to uphold families' right to know the fate of their missing relatives as provided under international humanitarian law and support their emotional, legal, social and economic needs. I also call on parties to conflict to take all possible measures to ensure the dignified and adequate management of the dead without adverse distinction and endeavour to facilitate the return of their remains to the families.

Finally, I encourage parties to collaborate with the International Committee of the Red Cross and its Central Tracing Agency as a neutral, independent and impartial intermediary. The ICRC is grateful for this opportunity to reflect on this important report with the Council, and stands ready to assist States in their efforts to increase the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

When we meet again in a year's time, we hope that the Secretary-General will be able to report favourably on three points: first, that there have been fewer armed conflicts; secondly, that improvements have been made in reducing the humanitarian consequences of military operations and in improving the protection of health care, especially in urban areas and in partnered operations; and thirdly, that measures are in place to increase early action and support for missing persons and their families.

I would like to finish with the words of Dr. Marco Baldan, an ICRC war surgeon who has worked in conflicts across the world:

> "As I stand in the emergency theatre, operating on patients riddled by bullets or torn apart by explosions, I wish a handful of the lead politicians in war-torn countries could join me. Would their decisions be different if faced, on a day-to-day basis, with the human cost of war, in its most raw manifestation? The tragedies I have seen so far in my career have left deep scars within me. Unlike many of my patients, my scars are invisible. Twenty years into my career, I muster up the courage to say, it does not have to be this way."

Dr. Baldan is right. It does not have to be that way. The people here in the Chamber today have the power to make changes and to ensure that civilians are protected from the worst impacts of war and violence.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Beerli for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Stagno Ugarte.

Mr. Stagno Ugarte: Resolution 2286 (2016) was a milestone that reaffirmed the principle that health facilities and personnel must be protected during armed conflict. Yet today, one year after its adoption, this is no time for celebration. According to a recent report by the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, attacks against health facilities have continued at alarming rates in 23 countries over the course of the past year. Although former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon presented a strong set of recommendations for the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), the Security Council has yet to affirm them.

Resolution 2286 (2016) warned that the prevailing impunity for attacks on health facilities and personnel in conflict could lead to a recurrence of such acts. As the resolution indicates, accountability, in particluar impartial investigations, prompt disciplinary measures and fair prosecutions, is an essential element of any strategy to end the widespread violations of the principle of protecting health facilities and services in conflict.

Yesterday, Human Rights Watch published a review of 25 attacks on health facilities that occurred between 2013 and 2016 in 10 countries. We found that little has been done to investigate such attacks or to hold those responsible to account, where appropriate. In such incidents, at least 232 people were reportedly killed, including 41 health workers and more than 180 injured. We believe that 16 of those incidents may have constituted war crimes, either because they were intentional attacks on protected health facilities, or because there is evidence of criminal negligence. And yet, no one appears to have faced criminal proceedings for any of the attacks. In fact, based on publicly available information, it does not appear as though 20 of the incidents that we reviewed were ever investigated. Perpetrators either ignored credible allegations about the attacks, publicly denied responsibility or blamed another party, without providing any supporting evidence.

Let me share an example. In February 2016, the two largest hospitals of Maret al-Numan in Syria were hit three hours apart. Those wounded in the first attack were immediately transferred to a nearby hospital, only to suffer a second attack. In all, 11 health workers and 17 patients and other civilians were killed. Russia and Syria, the likely perpetrators of both attacks, denied responsibility and claimed that United States-led coalition forces had carried out the strikes. The United States denied that allegation, and none of the parties investigated the incident. In three of the cases we reviewed, authorities indicated that they would investigate attacks but either failed to present any findings or have not concluded any investigation.

Let me share another example. In February 2016, Afghan security forces, reportedly accompanied by international military forces, raided a clinic in Tangi Saidan in Wardak Province. The soldiers handcuffed staff members while they searched the premises for Taliban fighters. They then took two patients, including a 15-year-old boy, and shot them dead outside the clinic. Both Afghanistan and NATO reportedly opened investigations into the incident, but neither has published any findings. NATO has stated that it found absolutely no evidence to support that allegation, without specifying which allegation it was referring to, or whether international military forces were present in the raid. Five of the cases reviewed were investigated, yet all five investigations were flawed. Almost all of them left critical questions unanswered, and many arrived at conclusions that contradicted our findings.

Let me share another example. In August 2016, an air strike hit the main hospital in western Hajja, Yemen, killing 19 and wounding 24, including 11 health workers. The task force established by the Saudi-led coalition forces to investigate potential violations of international humanitarian law committed by the coalition in Yemen investigated the incident and concluded that the air strike was an error, but failed to determine whether the attack violated the laws of war. The task force also claimed that the coalition was not aware that it was a hospital prior to the attack. Yet, Médecins Sans Frontières had clearly marked the roof of the hospital and repeatedly provided the coalition with the GPS coordinates of the facility, including just five days earlier. To date, the Saudi-led coalition has neither released further findings nor offered a public apology, nor has it, to our knowledge, offered compensation to victims.

Resolution 2286 (2016) also highlighted the importance of international justice mechanisms when domestic systems are unwilling or unable to respond appropriately. In many conflict countries, however, from Libya to the Central African Republic to South Sudan, State justice systems have become largely defunct, yet none of the incidents that we reviewed have been referred to international accountability mechanisms.

The Security Council has, however, one important accountability mechanism for the perpetrators of attacks on health care, under the children in armed conflict agenda. As part of the monitoring and reporting on parties to armed conflict responsible for recurrent attacks on schools and hospitals or related personnel, the Secretary-General is mandated to list the perpetrators in the annexes to his report. In the 2016 report (S/2016/360), the Secretary-General reported more than 350 United Nations-verified attacks on medical facilities or personnel in 10 States and listed nine parties to armed conflict in six States in the annexes to the report. Under Council resolutions, those parties must enter into action plans with the United Nations to end their violations, or be subject to possible targeted measures. To date, none of the parties have signed such action plans.

In order to enhance accountability for attacks on health facilities and personnel, Human Rights Watch therefore recommends that the Secretary-General

commit to alerting the Council of all future attacks on health-care facilities on an ongoing, rather than an annual basis. The United Nations system, consistent with its Human Rights Up Front initiative, should also prioritize the collection of information about such attacks wherever they happen, push States to hold perpetrators responsible and recommend avenues for accountability.

In that regard, Human Rights Watch would also recommend the following. In the light of some yawning gaps in reporting, the Secretary-General should ensure that all parties responsible for such attacks are listed in the annexes to his annual report on children in armed conflict. This is not the time — I repeat, not the time — to freeze new additions to the list. The Council should ensure that the list includes all perpetrators, with no exceptions. The Secretary-General should immunize the annexes to his annual report from political redactions by States by strictly upholding the technical merits of the monitoring and reporting process, as well as exercise his powers under Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations. United Nations country teams should engage in dialogue with listed parties and, wherever possible, negotiate concrete, time-bound action plans to end violations, as stipulated in previous Council resolutions. And, in the absence of such action plans by persistent perpetrators, the Council should impose targeted measures, as stipulated in its previous resolutions.

In addition to medical facilities, schools have also been bombed, burned and looted or converted to military bases and barracks. Students and teachers have been killed, injured, raped, tortured and kidnapped in at least 21 States since 2013, according to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. During the same period, schools have been used for military purposes in at least 24 conflict-affected States. By endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, 64 Member States have made commitments to better protecting schools during armed conflict and to refraining from using them for military purposes. We welcome these commitments and, as the Secretary-General does in his recent report on protection of civilians during armed conflict (S/2017/414), we encourage all Member States to endorse the Declaration.

The Security Council has long been failing in terms of early warning, which is the best strategy for avoiding civilian harm. As early as 1985, speaking on the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, then Secretary-General Pérez de Cuellar had already concluded that as

> "crises have frequently been brought before the Council too late for preventive action, it would seem to follow that the Council might well establish a procedure to keep the world under continuing survey" (*S/PV.2608, para. 15*).

Nothing except for political will has prevented the Council from adopting such procedures. The Council enjoys unfettered leeway in deciding, adapting or amending its internal procedures or creating subsidiary bodies to go about its business. Yet after major failures in Rwanda, Srebrenica and Sri Lanka, and all of the reports that followed on those failures, such common-sense procedures are still struggling to find a firm footing in the Council. As the 2012 inquiry into the Sri Lanka debacle highlighted, there was a systemic failure based on the absence of both an "adequate and shared sense of responsibility for human rights violations" and a

> "coherent strategy in response to early warnings and subsequent international human rights — and-humanitarian-law violations against civilians".

In drawing lessons and identifying improved early-warning procedures, the inquiry called on the Secretary-General to make more regular and explicit use of Article 99 to bring situations of concern to the attention of the Council. It also referenced the horizon-scanning briefings to the Council by the Department of Political Affairs as a welcome recent initiative undertaken by the United Nations. In that regard, while the Human Rights Up Front initiative that emerged in response to the inquiry is full of good intentions, it has failed — to date at least — to turn the receding tide on horizon-scanning briefings and to commit the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to using Article 99 in order to tell the Council what it needs to know and not what it wants to hear.

The Council has all the tools it needs, yet it sorely needs to abide by the promise of the very resolutions it adopts, resolution 2286 (2016) included. Otherwise, it is not only failing in its duties to protect medical facilities and services and to protect civilians trapped in armed conflict, but surely condemning itself to making devalued never-again apologies in future.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Ugarte for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay.

I should like at the outset to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his participation in this open debate and his introduction of his report (S/2017/414) on the protection of civilians and the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of civilians and medical assistance in armed conflicts.

I also thank the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Christine Beerli, and the Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch, Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, for their participation and informative perspectives, which have allowed us to appreciate, with admiration, the difficulties and risks that medical personnel face in areas of armed conflict.

Uruguay aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Spain, as well as that to be delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

It is an honour for me to preside over this open debate of the Security Council and to address a topic to which my country attaches particular important. In our first presidency in January 2016, we discussed this issue, which is the main component of Uruguay's extensive and active participation in peacekeeping operations.

A year since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), parties to conflict continue to increase attacks and bombings on hospitals and medical personnel in various settings, such as Syria, Yemen, Afgnanistan, South Sudan and Iraq. It is also those parties who block humanitarian access and even illegally seize medical materials and instruments intended to serve the civilian population. That indicates that there is still a long way to go for an effective implementation of resolution 2286 (2016).

Uruguay shares and supports the Secretary-General's vision, expressed in his report, for strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflict through collective action. Making that protection more effective will require the joint efforts of the Organization, Member States and civil society, whose work in conflict zones is fundamental and which my country recognizes as an invaluable contribution. States must also adhere to and respect international treaties relevant to the topic at hand, such as the Geneva conventions and their Additional Protocols. In addition, national legal frameworks on the protection of hospitals and medical personnel need to be strengthened.

I want to emphasize the importance of investigating attacks on medical facilities when they occur and ensuring that those responsible for those attacks are held accountable. According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, intentionally directing attacks against hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are grouped constitutes a war crime. However, in order to be able to judge those crimes, it is necessary to collect and analyze reliable and extensive information, as well as conduct independent and impartial investigations into specific incidents. It is an obligation on the part of the international community to identify and punish the perpetrators. States should ensure that complaints of serious breaches of international law relating to the protection of medical care in armed conflicts are systematically and effectively investigated.

In the face of the current international situation, all parties — States and non-State actors — should give access to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry established by the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, as well as to fact-finding missions established within the framework of the United Nations in order to carry out the corresponding investigations. Given the gravity of the crimes that we are discussing, the Security Council must assume its responsibility and decide on the application of sanctions or the referral of cases to the International Criminal Court. We are all aware that most attacks on hospitals and sanitary facilities do not constitute collateral damage. Rather, the attacks are deliberate and coldly calculated actions.

The most devastating attacks are those carried out by air forces, particularly those that employ the tactic of carrying out consecutive attacks. They launch a first attack that is followed by a second bombing that hits the relief personnel, in addition to the hospitals where the wounded are being treated. In none of those scenarios do the so-called rebel forces have their own air force. Those with air forces are the States involved in conflicts. Therefore, the primary responsibility lies with those States, including those that supply and sell aircraft to forces on the ground, or authorize their own thriving and prosperous businesses to engage in the supply and sale of aircraft and their corresponding weaponry.

In 2016, the world arms trade reached its highest level since the end of the Cold War, and international transfers of heavy weapons have increased steadily since 2004. The Congressional Research Center of the United States estimates that the value of world arms sales reached $80 billion in 2015. It also indicates that 73 per cent of those sales were made to developing countries, in other words, poor countries, countries that should spend their money on other things instead of on weapons. Furthermore, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute indicates that the five permanent members of the Security Council provided 75 per cent of the volume of the total arms exports for the 2011-2015 period.

Controlling the international arms trade is an obvious necessity, the first preventive step that should be taken. The international community took that first step with the signing of the Arms Trade Treaty in August 2015, thereby attempting to regulate such trafficking in a more responsible fashion. Nevertheless, a significant number of the main producers, exporters and recipients of armaments have not even signed the Treaty, so its practical effectiveness is gravely compromised. We call on all Governments to strengthen the regime of general and complete disarmament and to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty, so that we can have an international arms trade that is responsible with regard to conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons, their parts, components and ammunition.

The current level of violence and the unbridled hatred that is being expressed in several regions of the world mean that the respect for values and fundamental humanitarian principles is increasingly being violated. We see the helplessness of the international community when it comes to reacting to barbaric acts that we believed had been relegated to the depths of history.

The universal conscience trembles at the mere fact that hundreds, thousands, perhaps millions of innocent people, who quietly live their everyday lives, could, one day or another, fall victim to the lethal power of nuclear or conventional weapons. That is unacceptable. Women and men of good faith cannot resign themselves to accepting such a situation with their arms crossed, waiting for new fatalities. We must act with realism, with pragmatism. The measures we adopt must have timelines for execution, design and for perfecting monitoring and control mechanisms.

We cannot allow the repetition of such tragedies to dull our sensibilities and leave us indifferent. Let us take as an inspiration the example of the thousands of humanitarian and health workers who tirelessly and courageously risk their own lives to defend civilians. On Tuesday in this very Chamber (See S/PV.7947), we paid tribute to the personnel of peacekeeping operations who had fallen in the performance of their duty. We know that the problem will not be solved in a day, but only by bringing about a greater awareness in our societies, accountability, respect and strengthening international humanitarian law will we start taking the necessary measures.

Uruguay, as a small country both in population and in territory, but with a great tradition of peace and democracy, wishes to make its voice heard in defence of a more fraternal and peaceful world. It is a dream, but a dream is the beginning of all things. Then come the plans, the timelines, the actions. But the first thing is the dream. A dream that motivates, enthuses and gains the support of the multitudes and arouses hope. Even when everything seemed impossible, Martin Luther King was able to turn around a sad tale of unjust discrimination. But first, he enthused people. He did not say, "I have a strategic plan", but he said "I have a dream". His words may sound strange in an environment like this — where, by definition, we manage international politics in terms of a very stark realism that verges on disenchantment — but none of the great achievements of humanity throughout its long history would have been possible without a dream first, before venturing into boldness and illusion.

In conclusion, allow me to recall the following quotation from a speech entitled "The Chance for Peace", made by a former President of the United States of America, Dwight Eisenhower, in April 1953:

> "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its labourers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children".

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the Mr. Sergiy Kyslytsya, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the delegation of Uruguay for its initiative in drawing our attention to one of the most important topics in the area of protection of civilians in armed conflicts, namely, the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict.

I thank the Secretary-General for his informative briefing, as well as the other speakers. We are pleased that the focus of Mr. Guterres's presentation today in the open debate coincides with Ukraine's position, in particular in terms of strengthening respect for international law, the protection of civilians, including medical and humanitarian personnel, and the prevention of the forced displacement of refugees and internally displaced persons. We share the deep concern for the situation in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and other places where civilians, especially women and children, continue to be victims of armed conflicts.

Attacks on hospitals and medical facilities are a flagrant violation of international law. Stringent international legal principles have long provided absolute security to medical personnel and hospitals in conflict zones, but in modern conflicts hospitals and doctors have increasingly become the targets and victims of military operations. Not very long ago, we were all witness to the barbaric air strikes on medical facilities in Aleppo and the methodical destruction of the city's medical infrastructure.

When medical facilities come under fire or shelling, or are bombed, it is a multidimensional tragedy. Not only do such attacks sow death and destruction now, but the civilian population is deprived of the possibility of obtaining medical care and facilities for saving lives in the future are destroyed. That is why last year Ukraine co-sponsored resolution 2286 (2016). We are grateful to the delegations that promoted it, including the delegation of Uruguay, for such a timely initiative. Currently, our common goal is to develop effective mechanisms to monitor its implementation. In that regard, we would like to stress the following points that are important to us:

First, improving the procedures for documenting cases of violence against medical personnel and hospitals in armed conflicts. Gathering and documenting the data on attacks against medical facilities and medical personnel is a key element in developing an effective preventive system.

Secondly, we need to ensure independent and effective investigations of grave violations of international humanitarian law against medical institutions and personnel in situations of armed conflict. In this vein, we deem it appropriate that there be briefings or reports by the Security Council on the situation in countries where medical care is under threat of attack. Such reports, to our mind, should include information on investigations of violations committed by Member States.

An argument similar in content was made by our delegation as well as by many other speakers during the April meeting (see S/PV.7926) on the link between human rights and conflict prevention. We see significant parallels between our current topic of discussion and human rights as part of the area of competence of the Security Council.

Thirdly, it is vital to ensure accountability for acts of violence against medical personnel and hospitals. It is crucial that those responsible for such war crimes be brought to justice. We share the view that when national accountability mechanisms are insufficient, Member States must fully cooperate in the fight against impunity jointly with international institutions in the area of criminal justice, including the International Criminal Court.

We believe also that the Secretary-General can play a key role through his good offices, including in accordance with Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations.

In time of war, people begin to fear even everyday events and things that they take for granted under other circumstances. Today, in eastern Ukraine, getting to work, going to school, resting with one's family on Sunday afternoon, or working in one's own garden very often means a choice between life and death.

The aggressor country does not abide by the standards of the Geneva Convention or General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on compliance with international humanitarian law. Medical services continue to come under attack from the occupied territories of the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Medical emergency brigades in Ukraine are subject to bombardments and are fired on, even though they have emergency symbols on their vehicles and even though the geographic emergency coordinates are publicly known. In the region of Luhansk, in the area controlled by the Government, eight health centres were

damaged, out of a total of 11 buildings. In the Donetsk region, 29 health centres were damaged; five of them were demolished and have not been rebuilt because of the ongoing hostilities.

In February, in Avdiyivka, three BM 21 Grad missiles hit the hospital there, which continues to suffer from the fighting, with continuing damage being done to its electrical, water and heating systems. Despite all of this, the hospital continues to provide medical care, but the main building is so severely damaged that it cannot be restored.

The policy espoused by the administration of the Russian occupation in Crimea, which refuses the use of substitute maintenance therapy, which is of vital importance to patients, has led to dozens of deaths.

(*spoke in English*)

As stated by the Health Minister of Ukraine at the seventieth World Health Assembly in Geneva just a few days ago, the Government of Ukraine is unable to provide any health services whatsoever to the millions of Ukrainian citizens who remain trapped under Russian occupation.

In the occupied region of Luhansk Oblast, the situation has returned to the Dark Ages, with health policies copied from the Russian Federation. There are credible reports that anti-retroviral and tuberculosis treatment is unavailable; the only source is delivery by smugglers. There is a dangerous lack of detailed, data-derived insights into child health and of immunization, vaccine and polio status reports in the areas experiencing the most intensive conflict.

As a party to the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and its Additional Protocols, Ukraine committed to complying with its provisions and is disseminating knowledge of the norms and principles of international humanitarian law. Particular attention is paid to the protection of civilians, including medical and humanitarian personnel.

In order to fulfil these obligations, the armed forces of Ukraine organized personnel and staff training on compliance with the norms and principles of international humanitarian law during planning and the use of force in armed conflict.

These activities were carried out in cooperation with the delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Ukraine, the Danish Refugee Council, Taras Shevchenko National University, the Red Cross Society of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, the international charitable foundation Caritas Ukraine and other international and national human rights organizations.

With the support of these organizations, in 2017 training activities for the study of international humanitarian law covered all categories of personnel of the armed forces of Ukraine. These measures also cover personnel units returning from the immediate area of the anti-terrorist operation, as well as those moving to that area.

On 26 April, the Government of Ukraine adopted resolution 329, on the establishment of the Inter-Agency Commission for the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law in Ukraine. Since 2014, when the Russian aggression against my country began, we have been able to do a great deal to protect civilians. However, much work remains to be done. We also count on the support and assistance of the international community in the implementation of the relevant tasks.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I congratulate the representative of Ukraine on his excellent Spanish.

Mr. Takei (Japan): At the outset, I should like to congratulate you, Foreign Minister Nin Novoa, on your presentation and to thank you for holding this open debate. It is also my pleasure to see Secretary-General António Guterres again after the London Somalia Conference two weeks ago. I would also like to thank Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Deputy Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, for their insightful briefings.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict, including health care in armed conflict, is an imperative that requires the united efforts and courage of the international community. Japan is honoured to have assumed an important role, together with the other co-penholders, in drafting Security Council resolution 2286 (2016). In order to push for the realization of the principles of the resolution, Japan has urged all parties to conflict to take seriously the former Secretary-General's recommendations under that resolution. However, despite the unanimous adoption of that landmark resolution last year and despite our hopes, attacks on medical personnel and facilities have

continued in many parts of the world, especially in Syria and Yemen.

Japan associates itself with the statements to be delivered later by the representative of Spain, on behalf of the co-penholders of resolution 2286 (2016), and by the representative of Switzerland, on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

Against this backdrop, I would like to express my appreciation for Secretary-General Guterres' dedicated efforts in producing his informative report (S/2017/414). Allow me to comment on his vision for the protection of civilians and health care in armed conflict.

Japan fully supports the Secretary-General's vision for enhancing respect for international law and believes that raising awareness, as provided for under Recommendation 7 of the former Secretary-General's recommendations (S/2016/722, annex), should be the first step. In this regard, Japan has recently revitalized its National Committee on International Humanitarian Law. In addition, Japan has also participated actively in the multilateral discussions of the intergovernmental process on strengthening the respect for international humanitarian law, held in Geneva.

As the Secretary-General's report indicates, conflict prevention is the best way to avoid attacks and threats against civilians and medical personnel. Japan, which gives great importance to the concept of human security and which aims to contribute to sustaining peace, has been making various efforts in the field of peacebuilding to prevent the outbreak and recurrence of conflict, including by contributing $48.5 million to the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund and leading the discussion on institution-building at the Peacebuilding Commission.

I would now like to briefly touch upon the issue of forced displacement, refugees and internal displaced persons, which is also an important element in the context of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. At the Group of Seven (G-7) Foreign Ministers Meeting held in Hiroshima last year, the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Fumio Kishida, stressed the importance of the G-7 countries utilizing their respective strengths and proceeding with initiatives related to terrorism and the refugee crisis in a manner that is mutually complementary and generates synergistic effects. Furthermore, starting tomorrow, the issue of refugees and displaced persons will be discussed at the G-7 summit in Taormina, Italy. Japan will continue to work proactively on this issue.

One of the main factors behind the failure to prevent recurrences of attacks against medical personnel and facilities is the lack of accountability. While underlining the Security Council's active role in fact-finding and ensuring accountability, Japan emphasizes the important role of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission, with a view to ensuring respect for and compliance with international humanitarian law. Japan will continue to contribute to the Commission both financially and by nominating the most qualified and independent members it can.

Among the various issues related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the protection of health care in armed conflict should be a priority for the international community. As a member of the Security Council, Japan strongly condemns all attacks against medical facilities and personnel and is fully committed to realizing the principles of resolution 2286 (2016). We will continue to work closely with other Member States, the United Nations system and civil-society and international humanitarian organizations to make a substantial contribution in this area.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank you, Sir, for holding today's debate and ensuring that this Chamber hears the voices from civil society and your own statement. It is quite rare to get a round of applause from this audience. I also thank the Secretary-General and to the International Committee of the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch for their excellent contributions. I pay tribute to them and their teams' work.

The United Nations Charter is clear. Protecting civilians is supposed to be at the heart of what we do. When Governments fail to protect, people look to the Security Council for safety from the scourge of war. But for civilians in Syria, South Sudan and so many other places, this is not about words in the Charter or a debate held once a year; it is a horrific daily reality. The sheer scale of the need is unprecedented. The year 2016 saw record numbers of people needing assistance and protection, so many of them victims of conflict and of the flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, so many of them becoming victims of sexual violence, trafficking or other forms of slavery.

As our briefers make clear, that suffering has been made worse through cruel, unconscionable attacks on medical facilities. Look at the fall of Aleppo last year:

time and again the regime and its backers bombed that city until all the hospitals were out of action, so that the city could not even care for its injured. Sadly, the trend is spreading. As the Secretary-General pointed out, the urbanization of conflict in Aleppo, Mosul and Juba has increased the risk of destruction of hospitals, schools, water systems and power supplies. This cannot become the new reality of warfare.

Fifteen years on from the Council's first formal commitment to protecting civilians in armed conflict, it is clear that we need a new approach. I therefore welcome the Secretary-General's call to reinvigorate a global campaign, which should take practical steps to minimize civilian harm, protect those that are displaced, ensure peacekeepers perform their best and deliver accountability for those who flout compliance with international law. In support, we should all do four things.

First, we need to take practical steps to mitigate impacts on the ground. For instance, work is ongoing to fortify health-care facilities in Syria and to provide access to mobile clinics in Yemen. In South Sudan, United Kingdom peacekeepers are helping strengthen the security and accessibility of United Nations protection-of-civilians sites.

Secondly, we should share best practices. That means the full participation of women in efforts to protect civilians. It also means full compliance with international humanitarian law by all. In the United Kingdom, we train our military on international humanitarian law throughout their careers, including with country-specific courses before they deploy. We are sharing our expertise to help other Governments and their armed forces comply with international humanitarian law and we are helping them to make their military-justice systems more effective.

Thirdly, we need to collect better and more systematic data on attacks on medical facilities and personnel. We support the Secretary-General's commitment to do this within the United Nations system, but it is not enough to collect data; we need to use it. We therefore call for more Council briefings from the whole United Nations family, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict whenever attacks on medical facilities and personnel occur.

Finally, the Council needs to take action when violations occur. When States fail to act, it is our responsibility to decide that these abuses will not be tolerated, that we will hold those responsible accountable. In this Chamber, we have a duty to shine a light on those who fail to comply with international law. We have a duty to collect the evidence that is so essential for timely legal action against those who attack medical personnel and facilities in violation of international humanitarian law.

But we are not fulfilling that duty, not yet. So, today, let us all recommit to using the Council's authority, shouldering our responsibility to prevent conflict, to protect civilians and to hold to account those who violate international humanitarian law and those who violate and abuse human rights. The United Kingdom will continue to show leadership, including as part of the Secretary-General's global campaign.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China commends Uruguay for taking the initiative to hold today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and specifically on the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict. China welcomes Foreign Minister Mr. Nin Novoa for coming to New York to preside over today's meeting. I wish to thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing. China has listened carefully to the statements made respectively by Ms. Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the representative of non-governmental organizations.

At present, the security situation around the world remains grim. Hot spot issues in some areas gone unresolved for far too long, which have resulted in continuous armed conflict. The situation has put the growing insecurity of local civilians and their medical care into sharper focus. As such, this issue has attracted much attention from the international community. China supports the international community in taking robust actions to provide safety and security to civilians, medical workers and their facilities.

First, focus must be placed on conflict prevention and resolution so as to eliminate the root causes that jeopardize the safety of civilians, medical workers and their facilities in the first place. Countries must foster a sense of community and shared future and promote a paradigm of global governance based on joint consultations and contributions and shared

benefits in order to build a peaceful and a stable international environment.

Secretary-General Guterres has been actively campaigning for initiatives on conflict prevention and sustainable peace, which in our view is a valuable attempt to achieve the aforementioned goal. The international community should, working with one mind, implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and tackle the deep-rooted causes of conflict. At the same time, it is necessary to advocate a culture of peace and the promote national reconciliation. As the core of the collective security mechanism, the Security Council should effectively shoulder its responsibility for maintaining international peace and security by working to promote dialogue and negotiation and sustaining efforts to find political solutions to hot spot issues, so as to keep civilians in armed conflict out of harm's way.

Secondly, the Government and the parties to a conflict are duty-bound to protect the civilians. National Governments bear the primary responsibility when it comes to the protection of their civilians. Parties to conflict must respect international humanitarian law and implement all relevant resolutions of the Council, including resolution 2286 (2016); honour their obligation to protect civilians, medical workers and their facilities; and ensure that there is humanitarian access.

With regard to the victims of armed conflict, it is incumbent on the Government and the communities concerned to protect their legal rights and dignity and help them to reintegrate into their communities. With regard to cases of violations of international humanitarian law in armed conflict, such as human rights violations, threats to and attacks on health-care personnel and facilities, national Governments must take action to investigate and punish the perpetrators

Thirdly, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach and a working synergy. The civilian protection mandate embedded within United Nations peacekeeping operations, being an important means to protect civilians as it is, must strictly abide by the Council's mandate and should not be seen as a replacement for the responsibility and obligation to protect civilians that fall to our national Governments and the parties to the conflict. When designing a protection of civilians mandate, the Council should take into account to the overall condition and requirement of the host country and the capacity and the conditions of the peacekeeping missions so as to ensure that the relevant mandate is clear, practical and feasible.

Peacekeepers who commit sexual exploitation and abuse must be firmly punished. Regional organizations, such as the African Union, and international humanitarian agencies have comparative advantages and a unique role, which must be fully utilized. Efforts must also be made to enhance information exchanges a policy alignment so as to help affected countries enhance their ability to protect civilians. In this connection, it is also important to have an effective strategy to cope with the refugee situation, help host countries resettle refugees and resolutely stamp down on criminal activities against refugees.

Fourthly, we must do a good job of providing humanitarian assistance in armed conflict. China hereby pays tribute to all medical workers and humanitarian relief agencies for their humanitarian spirit in healing the wounded and rescuing the dying in armed conflict. We hope that, in carrying out their noble mission, they will abide by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, observe the guiding principles of United Nations humanitarian assistance, respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the host country, make a special effort to win the understanding and trust of the parties concerned and avoid being themselves involved in the conflict. Such an approach is conducive to the safety and security of medical personnel, their facilities and the humanitarian workers operating in armed conflict. The United Nations should play its coordinating role, keep channels open with all parties to the conflict and strengthen its supervision of h workers and others involved so as to create conditions for timely and safe humanitarian access.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to welcome the presence of Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay, Mr. Rodolfo Nin Novoa, at this meeting today. It is a privilege to have him in the Council.

I would also like to acknowledge the statements by the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Christine Beerli, and Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch. The three briefings were very important, not only because they touched the hearts of those of us in this Chamber, but they also touched the crux of the problems that our Organization in general

and the Security Council in particular are facing in this area.

Unfortunately, war has taken on a brutal dimension. Practices and dynamics have developed that, according to the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2017/414), have affected the lives of 65 million innocent people in various parts the world. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Yemen, over 21 million people need assistance or protection to satisfy their basic needs as a result of the conflict. In Syria, 13.5 million people need humanitarian assistance and 6.3 million have been displaced. In Libya, 2.4 million people need humanitarian assistance. In the same vein, the number of civilian fatalities — both because of terrorist attacks and confrontations among forces and parties to the different conflicts around the world — has increased owing to the indiscriminate bombing by various coalitions of hospitals, medical facilities, humanitarian assistance facilities, religious sites and even wedding celebrations, which are of no military importance but remain targets nonetheless. In accordance with the information provided by the Secretary-General in his report, in 2016 there were 108 attacks on medical facilities in Syria, 17 attacks in the Central African Republic and 19 attacks in Yemen. Moreover, the report indicates that every month around 30,000 people are injured in Syria alone, which is the equivalent of almost 42 victims per hour.

In that connection, on 3 May 2016, at the initiative of Uruguay, Egypt, Japan, Spain and New Zealand, the Security Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016), which seeks to protect civilians in armed conflict; protect humanitarian personnel and guarantee their deployment with complete security; and protect humanitarian infrastructure, among other things. However, despite the resolution, we still bear witness to violations of international humanitarian law through attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure and denial of access to medical assistance in armed conflicts, which is often not the result of an error, but rather a method of war. We urge States to ratify the Rome Statute, first in order to ensure its universality, and secondly to end impunity for such attacks.

We believe it important to recall here the Declaration made by the Heads of State and Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries at their seventeenth Summit, held in September 2016 on Margarita Island, Venezuela, which condemned the increasing attacks on humanitarian personnel and related facilities. We support it, needless to say, and firmly condemn all attacks and threats against civilians, hospitals, health facilities, water and power infrastructure, as well as attacks on the doctors who give their lives to help civilians trapped in armed conflicts, in what is cold-bloodedly referred to as "collateral damage" but which actually constitutes a war crime whose perpetrators must be brought to justice.

We urge all parties to any conflict to protect the civilian population and their property and health facilities, as well as humanitarian missions deployed on the ground. International humanitarian law and its principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity and independence were created in response to violence in armed conflicts and must be complied with in political and military disputes. Bolivia calls on the international community to take concrete action and to implement the commitments made by all members of the Security Council and of the United Nations generally to ensuring the safety of civilians in armed conflicts, especially women and children, who are the most vulnerable in situations of extreme violence. Bolivia also advocates for using peaceful means to resolve disputes — the use of good offices, preventive diplomacy, multilateralism, non-interference and respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of States — all of which are universal principles recognized by the international community and are effective tools for avoiding the scourge of war.

In that context, we call on Member States to support the Agenda for Humanity proposed by the United Nations, which is based on a five-point plan to guide the international community's efforts to alleviate humanitarian suffering and reduce risk and vulnerability. The five points are, first, preventing and, of course, ending conflicts; respecting international humanitarian law; ensuring that no one is left behind; changing the way we work so as to meet people's needs; and investing in humanity. That cannot be achieved as long as armed conflicts continue to erupt and innocent civilians continue to be seen as military targets, and as long as technology is used for war and destruction rather than peace.

The relevance or uselessness of this Organization, its success or failure, is measured by our ability to save lives. Every life lost, every person who is wounded or displaced, every refugee embodies our failure. We must share best practices and gather more and better

information to prevent such events from happening again. We must bring those responsible to justice, punish them and put an end to impunity. We must work on the underlying causes of conflict in the areas of development and civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and we must strengthen the rule of law and institutions. But apart from all of that, as you rightly said, Mr. President, we should stop feeding the monster of war, the enormous business of war. We must end interventionism and the logic of regime change, which have brought humankind so much pain.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Uruguayan presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's important and very welcome debate. I would also like to thank Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch, for their presence here today, their very informative briefings and their commitment and that of their teams.

I would also especially like to thank the Secretary-General for presenting his ambitious vision for the protection of civilians, so central to the prevention agenda. France fully shares that priority and ambition, to which the Council must fully contribute.

When we in the Council talk about Syria, about indiscriminate bombing in residential areas in defiance of respect for humanitarian law, as has been described; when we talk about Yemen, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Afghanistan or South Sudan, we are all conscious of the plight of civilians, women, children, journalists and medical and humanitarian personnel — those who pay the high price of conflict. The protection of civilians is one of our highest priorities, and the challenge is to translate that priority into action. That is why the Council has made the protection of civilians central to the mandates of peacekeeping operations that have to use robust methods. It is also why violations of international humanitarian law and human rights have been integrated into sanctions regimes. Those responsible for such violations must be punished more systematically, and we must go further.

We have specific tools that we should use to do that. The first is the aide memoire on the protection of civilians (see S/PRST/2015/23), which was updated in November 2015 and has become a concrete, comprehensive instrument. We should distribute it and make use of it as widely as possible. The second is the Kigali Principles, which provide guidance on conducting operations, training and cooperating with local communities on the ground. France supports them, and we should all do the same. The third is the recommendations that the Secretary-General made in his most recent report (S/2017/414), many of which are particularly useful. I would like to highlight three major issues that he raises that we should prioritize and make progress on.

The first is humanitarian access, which must be safe, immediate, full and unhindered, which, as we know, is far from being the case everywhere. In Syria, restrictions on humanitarian access are used as a method of warfare, which is unacceptable. In Yemen, effective and unhindered access must be restored for humanitarian aid and basic necessities. Needless to say, we are concerned about the famine not only in Yemen but also in Somalia, Nigeria and South Sudan, where nearly 20 million people are at risk. France will be organizing an Arria Formula meeting on this subject very soon.

The second priority is disappearances. We have heard the ICRC's warning, relayed by the Secretary-General, that in some areas disappearances have more than quadrupled since 2014. They are the result of fighting that displaces populations and separates families, as well as of kidnappings and arrests that include arbitrary detentions, torture and executions, as has happened in Syria. In that regard, France calls on all countries to ratify the Convention on Enforced Disappearance.

The third priority is justice, because there can be no protection of civilians without sanctions for violations of people's rights. We welcome the progress that has been made in some places. A special criminal court is being established in the Central African Republic. In Mali, the Joint Mechanism has already begun prosecutions. As a complementary measure, when nothing can be done at the national level, the Rome Statute enables the Security Council to make referrals to the International Criminal Court (ICC). In the case of Syria, as we know, France's proposal that the ICC be involved was vetoed. We should not forget the Council's responsibility in that regard, since evidence continues to be collected in cooperation with the International Commission of Inquiry and, soon, a dedicated mechanism. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we have taken note

of the statement by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to the effect that the violence between local militias and Congolese forces, the killing of many civilians and non-civilians, kidnappings and summary executions, including of United Nations experts on mission and their support staff, could constitute crimes within the Court's jurisdiction.

I would like to touch on resolution 2286 (2016) more specifically, because it is emblematic. Indeed, attacks on hospitals kill caregivers and patients, but they also condemn to death all those who would require care in future. The consequences for children, particularly in Yemen and Syria, are extremely alarming.

You have invited us, Mr. President, to share our actions to implement resolution 2286 (2016). I will cite three that concern the French forces.

The first example is notification and communication to the forces of no-strike lists, elaborated in connection with the ICRC, whose efforts I again warmly salute. The latest air campaigns in Libya, Mali and the Levant have all been carried out by systematically including personnel, vehicles and health infrastructure on the lists of protected properties, including their locations. Moreover, regarding the use of explosive weapons in urban areas, our very strict rules of engagement make possible the prevention of humanitarian consequences of our operations, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Secondly, with regard to the training of troops — ours and those with whom we cooperate — in Gao, Mali, the legal advisers of the Barkhane force are raising the awareness of the Malian forces as to the protection of medical facilities through regular training in the law of armed conflict, as but one example.

A third example is the protection due to the injured, whoever they are. Any member of the enemy belligerent forces who is wounded and collected by the French forces is cared for by the French army health service until his wounds have healed. French forces, when deployed in harsh environments, also provide medical care to civilians. As an example, I reaffirm the importance that France attaches to the fight against sexual abuse through concrete action in prevention, training and the fight against impunity.

To conclude, I will make a recommendation for the information of the Council. The Secretary-General highlighted the importance of early warning and of the collection of structured data in the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016). The annual report on the protection of civilians could include a dedicated appendix identifying the development and type of attacks on medical personnel and their facilities. I wish to recall the role of the World Health Organization (WHO) in that regard and to take the opportunity to congratulate the new Director-General of WHO, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, with whom the Security Council must be fully engaged.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I thank the Uruguayan presidency and Minister for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Rodolfo Nin Novoa, for putting the spotlight on the protection of health care in armed conflict and the Secretary-General for his insightful recommendations. We also express warm appreciation to Ms. Beerli, of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Ugarte, of Human Rights Watch, for their comprehensive briefings.

Statistics prove that about 75 per cent of all war victims are civilians, due to hostilities and the excessive use of explosives in urban areas. Those fatalities and gross violations of human rights are accompanied by large-scale forced displacements, which have led to a global protection crisis. The survival of injured victims is dependent on fully operational medical facilities and medical and humanitarian personnel. Therefore the destruction of those facilities might be used by armed groups as a new weapon of war. At the same time, we must acknowledge that health facilities are also frequently demolished as collateral damage in our attempts to fight terrorism and armed groups.

Last year Kazakhstan co-sponsored resolution 2286 (2016), whose unanimous adoption reflected the Council's unity in commitment to humanity in wartime. However, health-care personnel and facilities remain under fire in a number of conflicts. The effective implementation of this resolution becomes even more necessary. In that light, my delegation would like to make the following observations for consideration by the Council.

First, the United Nations and the Council should send a strong signal to all conflicting parties by implementing the relevant recommendations of the Secretary-General's latest report, of May (S/2017/414), such as enhancing respect for international law, providing impartial medical care and unimpeded access to humanitarian action, prioritizing the protection

of civilians in United Nations peace operations and finding durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons.

Second, accountability is critical. Perpetrators must be brought to justice in order to end all forms of impunity. All parties to armed conflict that are responsible for attacks on schools and hospitals must be precisely, without exception, listed in the annexes to Secretary General's annual report on children in armed conflict. The United Nations should engage with the listed parties to secure action plans to hold accountable those responsible for such attacks.

Third, the protection of civilians is primarily for the host country. Governments need to strengthen national mechanisms for independent investigations of such violations, together with the introduction of comprehensive security sector reform, rule of law and good governance. They should be supported by the United Nations system, regional organizations, peacekeepers, donors and the international community.

Fourth, the support of the international actors should focus primarily on tackling the root causes of conflict through conflict prevention, peacebuilding and development measures.

Fifth, we must actively use non-military protection tools, including strong political advocacy, vigilant reporting and monitoring. The need for the education and training of all stakeholders in the larger framework of international law is therefore absolutely essential. We also need to promote improved data collection by monitoring and analyzing data regarding attacks on health care facilities in armed conflict and to act accordingly.

Sixth, we underscore the importance of implementing the recommendations of the Secretary-General's June 2015 report (S/2015/453) and the relevant recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, which proposed that mandates to protect civilians need to be coherent, with a comprehensive political strategy. We also need operational clarity on the formulation and implementation of mandates, which has not always been possible due to differing perceptions and geopolitical positions in the Council. Lines become further blurred by parties to the conflict and players on the ground, including the role of non-State actors and foreign fighters, as a new phenomenon.

Seventh, attacks on health-care facilities and personnel have a devastating impact on women, children and persons with disabilities. All humanitarian responses must therefore address the rights and needs of vulnerable groups, including access to essential medical care. The full participation of women in decision-making will help ensure that those rights are respected. Victims of land mines and other munitions and the indirect effects of armed conflict, such as disease, malnutrition and famine, also require special medical care and specialized services. All of those problems can be effectively addressed only by bringing together international, regional and local stakeholders and civil society.

Finally, Kazakhstan pays tribute to the noble work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the humanitarian and human rights organizations. My delegation attaches the utmost importance to the security of civilians and is fully committed to implementing resolution 2286 (2016).

In conclusion, I cannot but agree with the passionate call of His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Uruguay that the dream will save the world. The Secretary-General has a dream and a vision, and all of us, collectively, need to help him in its realization.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The Senegalese delegation is pleased to see you, Mr. President, presiding over this Security Council open debate, which your country has decided to dedicate to the important theme of the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict — the first public debate of this kind since the Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016).

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/414) and the recommendations contained therein, as well as our briefers, Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Mr. Bruno Ugarte, Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch, for their continued commitment to the humanitarian cause.

In the report before us, the Secretary-General provides a pertinent description of his vision of establishing the protection of civilians and the prevention of conflicts as absolute priorities within the framework of the maintenance of international peace and security. Senegal, in accordance with the principle underlying its foreign policy, fully adheres to such a vision, which, we are convinced, will also deeply inspire the United

Nations, especially the Security Council, given that armed conflicts remain by far the number-one cause of humanitarian emergency in the world.

At the same time, during times of conflict, emphasis should be placed, on the one hand, on the protection of civilians and infrastructure — which, unfortunately, have become preferred targets — and, on the other hand, on the need for accountability, given the flagrant and systematic violations of international humanitarian law by parties to conflict. That is why the triptych of prevention, protection and accountability should, more than ever, guide the action of the international community. Indeed, as conflict prevention makes it possible to avoid the escalation of violence, which is a source of indiscriminate attacks and the displacement of persons, it should be the foundation of any security strategy. That is why it is necessary to strengthen the coherence of relevant policies introduced by the United Nations and by other international organizations.

In addition, everyone is aware that in the various hotbeds of conflict around the world, civilians and health facilities have increasingly been deliberately targeted by either armed groups or regular armies. Added to that are indiscriminate and recurring attacks on health facilities, medical personnel and humanitarian convoys and, therefore, on humanitarian workers — to whom I wish to pay due credit for their sacrifices, often made at the cost of their lives.

At the same time, as stressed by the Secretary-General in his report,

> "among the international community there is a growing sense of fatigue, even resignation, in addressing the suffering of civilians in conflict" (*S/2017/414, para. 2*).

Faced with that bitter observation, which has lasted too long, it seems to us that the time has come for the Security Council in particular to give priority to the protection of civilians, especially to medical personnel, health facilities and transport, in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, as well as all relevant international instruments.

While it is true that States have the primary responsibility to ensure the protection of civilians in times of armed conflict, the fact remains that the United Nations, through this Council, has an essential role to play in the matter. To that end, it is important to strengthen, in all ways, the culture of preventing violations of international humanitarian law and human rights and to combat the impunity of their perpetrators, whoever they may be.

For that, it remains essential to strengthen the prevention role of United Nations peacekeeping operations. When reviewing or establishing mission mandates, it is appropriate to consider capacity-building measures and measures to support security sector reform and, where appropriate, sanctions procedures. It is also appropriate to ensure that the resources of peace operations are adapted to their mandates.

As for the parties to conflicts, they are clearly obligated to respect international humanitarian law, while the international community has a duty to ensure that persons suspected of serious violations of these rules of law, including International law relating to the protection of medical care in time of armed conflict, are brought to justice. That is why military partnerships play a prominent role, as they offer a unique opportunity to influence the parties to the conflict and to ensure respect for international law. The achievement of these objectives requires a multidimensional approach that involves a variety of actors, including the Security Council, Member States and troop-contributing countries.

It is also essential to ensure the restoration of basic services, in particular by rebuilding hospitals and other medical facilities destroyed or damaged during attacks.

Another important aspect to be taken into account is the implementation of the measures taken by the Security Council in resolution 2286 (2016) and the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in this regard. In addition, all possible barriers to access to health care and related facilities should be lifted to allow for adequate deployment on the ground. Furthermore, local health organizations need to be supported in order to maintain a minimum level of service through tailor-made solutions, depending on circumstances on the ground.

Finally, quality training should be provided to military personnel in order to minimize disruptions to health-care services while safeguarding legitimate security concerns.

Despite the unanimous condemnation by the international community of indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations and health facilities in flagrant

violation of the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law, the report of the Secretary-General states that, unfortunately, the number of such attacks remained very high in 2016. Even more serious, the report states:

"Many incidents were never investigated, and where investigations were conducted they often failed to meet international standards, preventing effective corrective action and accountability (*ibid., para. 37*)."

It is for that reason that my delegation supports the strengthening of the international community's efforts through opening investigations of allegations of violations and the prosecution of perpetrators of attacks on health infrastructure — the services of which, of course, remain essential in times of armed conflict. It goes without saying that our generation has the opportunity, if it has the genuine will, to replace the culture of impunity with that of accountability.

My delegation believes that we can hold to the view that the best way to protect civilians is to create a protective and preventive environment that pays particular attention to the root causes of conflict, the promotion of human rights and the rule of law, and inclusive and sustainable development.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I want to thank Secretary-General Guterres for laying out his vision of how to respond to what he has rightly called a global protection crisis.

I also want to thank Mr. Ugarte and Ms. Beerli. Their organizations do critical work to promote accountability and respect for and protection of medical personnel and facilities in armed conflict. The United States especially values the participation of civil society organizations like theirs at these briefings, as well as the data and reporting provided by so many civil society groups on this issue.

There is little doubt that trends are getting worse when it comes to the protection of civilians. Parties to conflicts are using despicable tactics, starving entire cities until they surrender, deliberately bombing hospitals — sometimes the same hospital over and over — and raping and torturing civilians who are trying to flee. And yet as the Secretary-General has observed,

> "among the international community there is a growing sense of fatigue, even resignation, in addressing the suffering of civilians" (*S/2017/414, para. 2*).

The protection of civilians remains the primary responsibility of United Nations Member States, so changing this attitude of resignation means that we on the Council need to change our approach to responding to protection crises on the ground. We as a Council need to be honest with ourselves when Member States are not living up to their commitments, and we need to be willing to apply meaningful pressure when parties to a conflict do not change course. We should be calling on the United Nations to be more active and more explicit in naming perpetrators, and then follow up on the United Nations efforts with specific actions on the part of the Council, whether that means naming those responsible in our products or considering sanctions and other mechanisms for accountability. That is the way to start addressing the prevailing climate of impunity in so many of the conflicts on our agenda.

The protection of health-care facilities and medical workers in armed conflicts remains of particularly grave concern to the United States. One year ago, the Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016), which emphasized that attacks directed against medical personnel and facilities must cease and that the perpetrators of violations must be held accountable. However, in far too many places these attacks have not only continued but have gotten worse, and many of these attacks are not incidental. In some cases, warring parties are attacking hospitals precisely because medical staff are doing their jobs of treating the sick and the wounded.

In Syria, the Al-Assad regime, with help from Russia, Iran and Hizbullah, has attacked and destroyed medical facilities in a relentless campaign of destruction. Physicians for Human Rights recorded 108 attacks against medical facilities in 2016 alone. Since the start of Syria's civil war, the Al-Assad regime and its allies have reportedly been responsible for 90 per cent of the 454 attacks on medical facilities. The world witnessed this cruelty during the offensive last year against eastern Aleppo. Between July and November 2016, the Al-Assad regime reportedly bombed every single hospital in eastern Aleppo, leaving as many as 250,000 civilians with virtually no access to medical care. Some hospitals were attacked by the regime more than once, and Al-Assad's forces would not even spare maternity wards or children's hospitals. The Council has heard first-hand from doctors about the horror of treating patients in makeshift basement emergency rooms, where doctors had to retreat to avoid the regime's indiscriminate attacks. The attacks on medical workers

and facilities in Aleppo last year will not be forgotten. They are a stain on the Council and on the members that refused to stop it.

Turning to Yemen, the fighting has led to the rapid deterioration of the country's health-care infrastructure. Just 45 per cent of medical facilities are still open, even as nearly 70 per cent of the population needs humanitarian aid. The results are devastating. Over the past three weeks, Yemen has witnessed a quickly spreading cholera outbreak. The World Health Organization has reported a 50-per cent increase in cases since 27 April, and hundreds have already died from this treatable illness. With Yemen's resources so overstretched, all sides of the conflict in Yemen must take all feasible precautions with a view to avoiding or, in any event, minimizing civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure, especially medical facilities. Attacks on health facilities and health workers only exacerbate Yemen's humanitarian crisis. The parties must do everything possible to facilitate access to humanitarian aid — both getting aid into the country and distributing it throughout the country.

Finally, in South Sudan the challenge is not about attacks from the air but about the calculated efforts of the Government forces and armed groups to deny humanitarian access, intimidate aid workers and prevent health facilities from functioning. Since December 2013, not only have 100 medical facilities closed, but 29 have reportedly been ransacked or destroyed. South Sudan remains one of the world's most dangerous places to be an aid worker, and the violence is getting worse. Just two months ago, six staff members from a UNICEF partner were killed in a vehicle marked with the logo of their non-governmental organization (NGO), in the worst attack on humanitarians since the war began. Humanitarian convoys carrying life-saving aid have come under attack attack repeatedly. Even with famine declared and cholera on the rise in South Sudan, the Government still imposes a never-ending series of bureaucratic obstacles that keep the United Nations and its partners from delivering food and medicine to the people who need it most. We could go on and on.

One recent report issued by a coalition of NGOs documented attacks against medical personnel and facilities in no fewer than 23 different countries around the world. One year after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), this track record is simply unacceptable. The Council must therefore strengthen its resolve to stop attacks directed against medical personnel and facilities, end impunity for perpetrators of violations, and focus on preventing harm to the tens of millions of civilians trapped in armed conflicts. This has to be a collective and continuous effort in the year to come.

We have a choice here today. We can let another year go by and then sit here again to lament still more attacks against hospitals and medical workers, or we can come together now and take steps to reverse the rising tide of violence on the ground by using the tools at the Council's disposal to push warring parties to live up to their obligations to protect civilians. That choice should be obvious, and we need to make the choice that saves lives.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I would like to start by commending Uruguay for convening this open debate one year after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016). Let me also thank the Secretary-General for his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2017/414) and his briefing this morning. We are grateful to him and all other briefers for sharing their thoughts on the theme of our debate today.

In our consideration of various conflict situations around the world here in the Council, there have been concerns about the grave violation of international humanitarian law committed by parties to armed conflict. This has to do with the means and methods of combat used by conflicting parties, particularly widespread and indiscriminate attacks against civilian populations. We are also alarmed by reports of continued attacks on civilian objects, such as schools and hospitals, the denial of access for humanitarian actors operating in accordance with international humanitarian principles, as well as attacks, the threat of attacks and obstruction hindering humanitarian assistance, including health-care services and personnel.

Violence against health care in armed conflict has devastating short- and long-term consequences for affected communities, health-care facilities and thousands of health-care staff and volunteers who provide assistance. Such reports in various conflict situations result in forced displacement, poverty and lack of access to basic services. Of particular concern to us is, of course, the impact on civilian populations, including the untold suffering and loss of life, the displacement of people internally and across borders, as well as the weakening of the capacity of health-care systems to provide the necessary care to the civilian

population, as highlighted by the Secretary-General in his report.

Ethiopia welcomes the three protection priorities identified by the Secretary-General in his report, which are aimed at strengthening compliance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law, the protection of humanitarian and medical missions, and the prioritization of civilian protection in United Nations peace operations, as well as at preventing forced displacement and at finding durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons. We also note his vision for strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In that regard, we would like to make the following five points.

First, Ethiopia recognizes the importance of strict compliance with international humanitarian law by all parties to an armed conflict, especially where that law relates to the means and methods of combat, which includes the protection of civilians against the effects of hostilities involving a deliberate or accidental attack. We would encourage the further exploration of the impact of the risks associated with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in violation of international humanitarian law, which again relates to the means of warfare used by parties to an armed conflict and their possible devastating impact on civilians.

Secondly, while concurring with the importance of accountability in strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law, strengthening or establishing national and regional accountability mechanisms should be encouraged.

Thirdly, as one of the largest refugee-hosting countries, Ethiopia is encouraged by the inclusion of forced displacement as one of the key priority areas for action by the Secretary-General in his report. We also appreciate his recognition of the indispensable role of United Nations peace operations in protecting civilians. We want, however, to emphasize that United Nations peace operations should be provided, from the beginning, with the necessary resources and capabilities, including the equipment and training needed to fully implement their mandates. As much as possible, that should be coupled with the capacity to address the needs of the victims of serious violations and the capacity to respond to the humanitarian needs of the civilian population, particularly internally displaced persons. The capacity to find durable solutions to assist internally displaced persons should be further strengthened. Such capacity would enable us to respond to the protection needs of civilians, while preventing any further displacement and reducing their vulnerability to the impact of armed conflict.

Fourthly, the Council should look closely at the conclusions reached by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict with regard to the various country situations involving children and armed conflict. It would also be important for the Security Council to make greater use of the informal expert groups relating to the protection of civilians so as to track serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Finally, as one of the major troop-contributing countries and a signatory to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, I would like to conclude by reiterating the firm commitment of Ethiopia to the protection of civilians. We will continue to work with all of the relevant actors in that regard.

Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni (Sweden): I thank you, Sir, for organizing today's debate.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

I also thank you for the enthusiasm with which you presented your views.

(*spoke in English*)

I should also like to thank the Secretary-General, Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch, for their important and inspiring contributions.

Sweden fully endorses the statements that will be made later today on behalf of the European Union and on behalf of the Group of Nordic Countries by the representative of Norway.

The Fourth Geneva Convention puts the protection of civilians at the heart of international humanitarian law. The Charter of the United Nations puts it at the heart of the mandate and responsibility of the Security Council. Sadly, despite those protections, one might say that it has never been as perilous as it is today to be a civilian in the middle of armed conflict. It has been forty years since the adoption of the Additional Protocols of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions, which specifically strengthen the protection of civilians Yet, almost every day, the Council is faced with testimonies to the most

brutal, barbarous and premeditated instances of the targeting of civilians as a tactic of war.

From the atrocities in Syria and in the inaccessible villages of Borno State in northern Nigeria and the man-made famine ravaging South Sudan to the crisis in Yemen and the attacks on medical facilities in Kunduz in Afghanistan, the Secretary-General and the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross rightly speak of a global protection crisis. The current level of preventable suffering is horrifying, and, as we have stated repeatedly, utterly unacceptable.

It is incontrovertible that States have the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians. At the same time, the international community, including the Council, must do more. We welcome the Secretary-General's proposed path to protection and his recommendations for a more ambitious approach for the United Nations across the board. The path to protection is strongly linked to the Secretary-General's prevention agenda. Such an approach saves lives and prevents suffering. It also has the potential to save billions of dollars in humanitarian aid, which can, in turn, be invested in building stable and prosperous societies.

Once a year, we meet here to speak about the protection of civilians in an open debate. Every day, however, we address those issues in our work. It is our responsibility to ensure the protection of civilians in each and every conflict, but often we fail. How can we do better? The protection of civilians' agenda is broad. Today, I will limit myself to focusing on three issues.

First, we can ensure respect for international humanitarian law, as well as international human rights law. Where once civilian deaths were seen as the unavoidable accidental casualties of war, we now see civilians being actively targeted. Deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure are seen as just another tool in the toolbox of warfare. We fully agree with the Secretary-General that the narrative that civilian deaths in war are inevitable must be reversed. In fact, such deaths can be prevented.

International humanitarian law provides a foundation for prevention, as well as for reconciliation, peacebuilding and accountability. The protection and promotion of human rights contributes to addressing the root causes of instability. We can include a gender perspective in the implementation of international humanitarian law. It would ensure that all civilians — both men and women — get the effective protection to which they are entitled, as well as impartial humanitarian assistance. Women and girls face heightened and specific risks in situations of armed conflict. It is, therefore, important that the situation and needs of women and girls in armed conflict be addressed. Furthermore, the particular vulnerabilities and protection needs of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons — especially children — need to be recognized, considered and addressed

Secondly, we can take concrete steps forward by building upon landmark resolution 2286 (2016) and the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General of August 2016 (S/2016/360). The legal and policy framework for protecting the sick and wounded and those endeavouring to assist them is in place. Sweden is ready to engage. My Government's ministerial delegation on international law and disarmament is in the process of developing new and concrete proposals to strengthen the protection of medical care in armed conflict

Thirdly, with regard to peacekeeping, we can ensure that cross-pillar political strategies guide all peace operations. The protection of civilians cannot be seen as optional. It must be politically prioritized within those strategies, properly resourced and integrated across the work of missions. That requires the availability to the Council of relevant and accurate information with respect to the protection of civilians, which, we believe, should be included in reporting by the Secretary-General and other mechanisms, while drawing on the whole of the United Nations system.

Missions have a critical role in ensuring that protection needs are identified, reported and addressed. Women's participation must be ensured at all stages of protection strategies in order to ensure that those strategies address the needs of the entire population. Building the capacity of United Nations troops and police, including in the protection of citizens, is part of a larger peacekeeping reform that must be sustained.

Finally, as the Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we would also like to highlight the fact that the Security Council's children and armed conflict agenda has an important accountability mechanism for dealing with the perpetrators of attacks on schools and hospitals. That includes its monitoring and reporting mechanism, namely, the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict with its annexes, which

list the perpetrators of such attacks and United Nations action plans concluded to end such violations. In order to address the widespread impunity for attacks on health care, we can fully utilize that mechanism.

We have made much progress on the protection of civilians within the Council and within the work of the United Nations more broadly. The legal framework is there; the resolutions have been adopted and agreed. We must now start down the path of protection that reinforces respect for international humanitarian law, while working to prevent and end conflict. Doing so will require the full commitment and strong leadership of both the Secretary-General and the Security Council.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Secretary-General and the briefers for participating in today's meeting.

The issue of the protection of civilians has longbeen inscribed in the Security Council's agenda. We believe that it is justified for that issue to remain the focus of the Council's attention. As the nature of conflict changes, the issue of the provision of health care for and protection of the sick and wounded is of particular importance. In many hotspots today, hostilities occur in densely populated areas whose inhabitants are heavily dependent on the smooth functioning of the medical infrastructure. The parties to the conflict, wherever it is taking place, should take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of civilians. That includes providing humanitarian and medical assistance.

The work of the international community in should seek to carry out humanitarian tasks, such as alleviating the suffering of civilians. However, we do not believe that it is right to disconnect the matter of medical assistance from the general context of the protection of civilians and efforts to settle conflicts. We highly value the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in lending assistance to civilians, including through the provision of medication, the training of staff, the provision of medical assistance and the sharing of knowledge on the norms of international humanitarian law. We believe that the proposals made by the ICRC to review the best practices in that area warrant additional study.

The need civilians have for medical assistance is often used, contrary to the provisions of international law, to achieve military and other advantages. Once again, we must draw attention to the disastrous situation regarding access to medical assistance in eastern Ukraine. Indiscriminate attacks by the armed forces of Ukraine have destroyed much civilian infrastructure, including hospitals. For example, in January, artillery fire hit hospitals and middle schools in Makiivka. Over the past three years, as a result of the blockade from Kyiv, civilians have been unable to receive the necessary care and medication. The report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2017/414) highlights Kyiv's ban on trade with the south-east of Ukraine, affecting, inter alia, the provision of medical supplies to the area.

Our country, unlike the Ukrainian authorities, has provided and continues to provide full-scale assistance, including health care, to the citizens of the south-east, whose lives and health are threatened daily by the targeted action of the Ukrainian Government. Appeals from international humanitarian workers and human rights advocates, who often note that it is the most vulnerable who suffer from the blockade, including children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, have not led to any results. We would like to address our appeal to the delegation of Ukraine and call for Ukraine to lift the inhumane restrictive measures that it has imposed on its own people.

Elsewhere, humanitarian workers, including medical personnel, have increasingly been the victims of terrorist armed groups. We do not have to look very far for examples, such as the attack by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant fighters on the military hospital in Afghanistan in February and on ICRC staff in March. We should also recall tactics such as disguising fighters' sheltmedical centres, the use of the wounded and the sick as human shields, and the creation of obstacles to the provision of humanitarian assistance, as well as the forcible seizure of medications from civilians. In eastern Aleppo, the issue of medical evacuation was brazenly used as a bargaining chip by terrorists. There has been grim information regarding attacks by terrorists on medical workers, which underscores the need for additional efforts by States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations to strengthen mechanisms to ensure the safety of humanitarian staff.

At this stage, we believe that the legal frameworks we have for dealing with the issues at hand are quite sufficient. The focus should be on practical measures to uphold the relevant principles and standards. Resolution 2286 (2016) provides States and parties to a conflict with the necessary guidelines on the issue. Regarding the set of health-care recommendations proposed by

the Secretary-General in 2016, we have already shared our assessment on that matter. We believe that those recommendations could provide a basis for future work, but we should not, in our opinion, forget that they also contain a number of contentious issues that go beyond resolution 2286 (2016) and the norms of international humanitarian law.

We have studied the recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We support the intention to ensure the pooling of efforts to prevent conflict and protect civilians. In our view, such an approach should be based on international law and should not impose any artificial hierarchies; it could then lead to positive results. However, we would like to warn against any arbitrary interpretation of the norms of international humanitarian law and other documents. We do not challenge the need for measures to ensure that those responsible for the killing of civilians, including medical staff, should be held to account. But we do not share the rosy assessment of the activities of the International Criminal Court with regard to the so-called mechanism for conducting investigations in Syria. As we have noted, the establishment of that mechanism was a blatant violation of the Charter of the United Nations.

The current skyrocketing level of confrontation and politicization in international affairs has also had an adverse impact on the matter of the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel. Against the backdrop of uncorroborated allegations against Russia, the lack of response in 2016 to the strike on a Russian mobile hospital that was lending assistance to Syrians was a blatant example of double standards. As a result of the strike, two nurses were killed and one doctor seriously wounded. Those who only want to raise anti-Russian hype were not interested in the information on the overfilled stockpiles of medicines in eastern Aleppo, which militants kept from the population suffering from a lack of medications. Double standards are visible in the information available on the military campaigns in Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and other countries and on the actions of the so-called coalition in Syria. There is a so-called coalition in Syria. Civilian infrastructure, including health facilities, have been subject to strikes with frightening regularity, including international armed forces. The umber of casualties caused by such attacks amounts to hundreds, if not thousands of killed.

For exampn February, as a result of a rocket strike on Idlib, the ICRC mission, including medical equipment, was damaged and personnel were injured. As a result of strikes carried out by the international coalition on 17 and 30 April on a field hospital in Al-Tabka,Syria in April, 14 civilians were killed. However, for many years, those incidents have been ignored or have been presented as unavoidable collateral damage. Given the unprecedented abuse in the information sphere, the reliability and credibility of data on the protection of civilians, including attacks on medical staff, and the weighing of all the factors and circumstances, are of particular importance. All factors and circumstances should be taken into account. We believe that the relevant bodies of the United Nations should be guided by the imperatives of thorough verification and unbiased analysis of the information that comes to them. That also pertains to the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

In conclusion, we would like once again to express our gratitude to all those who, even in harsh conditions, provide medical care to civilian populations in zones of armed conflicts, often at the cost of their own lives.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Uruguayan presidency for convening this important open debate on the protection of civilians and medical personnel in armed conflicts.

The plight of civilians as a result of the ongoing conflicts in various corners of the globe, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, has unequivocally demonstrated the inaction of the international community and its failure to provide protection to civilians and preserve their dignity and humanity. That is especially the case for the most vulnerable demographic groups, namely, women and children. Despite the development of the concept of the protection of civilians following the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and the subsequent priority given to the protection of civilians by the Security Council, we have not seen words being translated into tangible actions on the ground that would lead to the systematic protection of civilians. Therefore, the entire system of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, must adopt more effective measures in order to ensure such protection.

We share the priorities defined by the Secretary-General in his report on the protection of civilians in

armed conflicts (S/2017/414) aimed at promoting a system of civilian protection. In that vein, we would like to focus on the second priority defined by the Secretary-General: the need to work on providing protection for medical missions. Attacks on health-care facilities and personnel, as well as on injured patients, constitute a heinous violation of international humanitarian law. In that framework and in the light of the increasing attacks against the health-care sector, including perceived moves by some parties to put obstacles in the way of access to medical facilities and equipment, the Security Council, at the beginning of Egypt's presidency in May 2016, adopted resolution 2286 (2016), which focused on health care in armed conflicts. That historic and important initiative, launched by five elected members of the Security Council, including Egypt, reaffirmed the commitment provided for in international humanitarian law to the protection of the health-care sector. It also condemned any attacks on medical facilities and personnel. Furthermore, the resolution urged States to adopt practical and effective measures to prevent such violations and address them. It also stressed the need to hold perpetrators of such attacks accountable and eliminate the immunity with which those perpetrators appeared to be acting. It also called upon the parties to provide safe and unhindered access to medical care.

The adoption of the resolution was a milestone in the conceptual development of the protection of the health-care sector. However, it has not substantively changed the situation. The targeting of health-care workers in zones of armed conflict continues unabated. Ironically, 2016 saw a huge rise in the frequency of attacks targeting the health-care sector. The primary responsibility for providing protection for civilians lies with the States that are parties to the conflict, pursuant to the Geneva Convention of 1949. However, recent incidents around the world have shown the need for concerted international efforts to prevent such violations and bring to account the perpetrators, all while fully respecting national sovereignty.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm that today's open debate presents an opportunity to assess the progress made in implementing resolution 2286 (2016). We call upon States to shoulder their responsibilities and implement their commitments pursuant to that resolution. For our part, we will spare no effort to achieve the targets contained in the resolution, as we are eager to uphold the noble values and principles of international humanitarian law.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I thank the Uruguayan presidency for this open debate, which marks the first anniversary since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of medical and humanitarian personnel and facilities.

I would also like to thank the briefers — first of all, the Secretary-General for his participation in this open debate and the introduction of his report (S/2017/414), as well as the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Christine Beerli, and the Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch, Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, for their interesting and insightful thoughts and presentations.

Italy aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

Last year's adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) by consensus and with a very large number of sponsors was a landmark achievement by the Security Council. It sent a powerful message to the international community by calling on all parties to conflicts to give special protection to medical and humanitarian personnel and facilities, and to ensure accountability for violations and ensure the concrete implementation of the resolution's provisions, including the need to share best practices.

Italy supports the provisions of resolution 2286 (2016) as a tool to implement and increase respect for the cardinal principles of international humanitarian law and the 1949 Geneva Convention. We must recall the obligation enshrined in Common Article 1 of the four Geneva Conventions and the first 1977 Protocol, not only to respect the Conventions, but also to ensure respect for the Conventions in all circumstances. In that regard, we are committed to the full implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) and its provisions on the protection of civilians and health-care facilities and personnel. We will also contribute to the important role of advocacy to that end. Today's open debate forms a part of that effort, as well.

Since the adoption of the resolution on 3 May 2016, we have, unfortunately, witnessed further deterioration of the situation, with increasing attacks in which civilians have been sacrificed in the name of the warring parties, whose destructive strategies and objectives demonstrate that the well-being and safety of their own populations are clearly not the top priority. It happens everyday — in Syria, in Yemen, in South Sudan, as

well as in many other places. It is time to translate words into actions. We urge that not only must health-care facilities and personnel not be targeted in the context of conflicts, but also that safe and unimpeded humanitarian passage be guaranteed to them in order to ensure the quickest, most effective delivery of relief to the populations in need.

Those that suffer the most devastating effects from conflicts are often children. For that reason, Italy condemns, in the strongest terms, attacks directed against schools, as well as any military use of schools, recalling in that regard the Safe Schools Declaration, which we hope that more Member States will sign.

Conflicts bring about a vicious cycle of forced migrations, refugee flows and human trafficking, which all involve many children. We reiterate our deep concern over the smuggling of migrants and human trafficking, which endanger the lives of thousands of people in the Mediterranean Sea. Italy will continue to spare no efforts to combine security, solidarity and development in order to dismantle the business model of the traffickers and save lives at sea. That effort also involves protecting the lives of civilians, most of whom are fleeing conflict.

Italy supports the three protection priorities outlined by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2017/414), namely, to enhance respect for international law, with particular attention to urban warfare; to protect humanitarian and medical missions and prioritize the protection of civilians in United Nations peace operations; and to prevent forced displacement and pursue durable solutions for displaced persons and refugees. We also support the recommendations of the Secretary-General in that regard, addressed both to Member States and to the Council, including the need for systematic data collection, analysis and reporting.

We would like to point out two other important priorities regarding the effective protection of civilians. The first is upstream, namely, prevention, and the other is downstream, namely, accountability. Preventing conflicts through a holistic, comprehensive approach that addresses root causes is the best way to protect civilians. That is why we particularly appreciate the reference in the report to the necessity of strengthening early warning and early-action mechanisms.

At the same time, prevention would be largely ineffective if not coupled with downstream accountability. Violations of international humanitarian law and human rights principles must be investigated, and the perpetrators must be brought to justice, including, where appropriate, by making fuller use of referrals by the International Criminal Court. Let us not forget, in that respect, that the primary responsibility for protecting their own population lies with the States themselves and their national judicial systems.

Finally, Italy was among the first signatories and promoters of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians and the Responsibility to Protect, rightly recalled in the Secretary-General's report. In that connection, Italy contributes to capacity-building through specific courses for peacekeepers on the protection of civilians, which are carried out by the Italian Carabinieri's Centre of Excellence for Stability Police Units in Vicenza. We hope that more Member States will subscribe to the Kigali Principles, which are crucial, in our view, for the protection of civilians by our peacekeeping missions.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to remind all speakers to restrict their statements to no more than four minutes in order to allow the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Molina (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take the floor on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM) in this open debate where we are commemorating the first anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel in armed conflict.

First, on behalf of the States members of NAM, we wish to convey our respects to Mr. Rodolfo Nin Novoa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay. We also convey our best wishes to his delegation for a successful month in leading the work of the Council. We also recognize the efforts made in preparing the concept note (S/2017/365, annex) for this open debate, which will serve as a basis to guide our discussions today. We also thank the Secretary-General for his statement and Ms. Christine Beerli and Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte for their briefings.

The world in which we live today faces many complex, new and emerging threats and challenges to international peace and security. They include those brought on by terrorism and violent extremism and war and protracted conflicts. In the context of armed conflicts, we have seen how the human suffering of innocent civilians, trapped in the midst of the conflict, can be exacerbated by deliberate, indiscriminate and, in some cases, systematic attacks on the wounded and the sick, on health-care personnel and humanitarian personnel dedicated exclusively to medical missions, and on their means of transport and equipment, as well as on hospitals and other health institutions. That includes attacks perpetrated by non-State actors, all of which jeopardize the inviolability of those institutions under international law.

The Non-Aligned Movement therefore emphatically condemns such acts of violence, attacks and threats. The Non-Aligned Movement deplores the consequences over the long term of such attacks on the civilian population and the health systems of the affected countries. Those attacks, which could constitute war crimes, must come to an end. Those responsible must face justice in order to break the cycle of impunity and send a clear and united message of zero tolerance.

In that regard, during the 17th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, which took place in September 2016 on Margarita Island, Venezuela, the Heads of State and Governments condemned the increasing attacks on the safety of humanitarian personnel, and they called on the Governments of States Members of the United Nations to guarantee the protection of the personnel of humanitarian organizations, in accordance with the relevant international law and its humanitarian provisions.

In reaffirming that the protection of civilians throughout their territory is the primary responsibility of host countries, the Heads of State and Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries recognized that that task is sometimes also entrusted to United Nations peacekeeping operations, to which they reaffirmed their commitment.

In that regard, the members States of the Non-Aligned Movement recognized that many humanitarian agencies and health personnel operate in countries where United Nations peacekeeping missions are deployed, where they play an important role in assisting civilians in the context of armed conflicts. It is therefore necessary for all parties to comply fully with their obligations under international law, as appropriate, and under international humanitarian law, in particular their obligations under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their obligations under the Additional Protocols of 1999 and 2005, as indicated in the concept note (S/2017/365, annex) for this open debate. That is needed in order to enable and facilitate the safe and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief, including medical missions, personnel and supplies.

The member States of the Non-Aligned Movement also call on all parties to international armed conflicts to redouble their efforts to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. That includes the principles of precaution against attacks, proportionality and differentiation aimed, inter alia, at banning attacks against civilian populations, civilian property and some special properties during an armed conflict. This also includes the obligation of the parties to any conflict to ensure general protection from dangers posed by military operations to civilian facilities, hospitals, means of transport and relief materials, as well as to the distribution of such materials.

The Non-Aligned Movement also stresses that humanitarian agencies and their personnel must respect international humanitarian law and the laws of the country in which they are operating, as well as the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance set out in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182, including the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, as well as non-interference in the internal affairs of host countries, and the sovereignty, territorial integrity, national unity and independence of States.

The Non-Aligned Movement recognizes the importance of early and effective recording and census systems as a means of quantifying and assessing the need for the provision and delivery of humanitarian assistance. It recognizes also the need to respect international refugee law and to preserve the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps, and in this regard calls on receiver States to ensure the demilitarization of refugee camps.

Another matter of deep concern to the States members of the Movement is their ability to respond to humanitarian emergencies, including in the context of armed conflict, owing to the impact of various phenomena ranging from climate change to the consequences of the economic and financial crisis, and

from insecurity in the area of food, energy and water to the negative impacts of unilateral coercive measures, among many others. In this regard, we must work together to address these challenges and strengthen our capacity for resilience, particularly in terms of prevention, preparedness and response.

In conclusion, the 120 States members of the Non-Aligned Movement wish to pay tribute and acknowledge the commendable work done by the many humanitarian workers, including physicians and other health personnel, who are carrying out their work in the context of armed conflicts and who, in many cases, work under adverse conditions on the ground, risking their lives daily, in their quest to alleviate the human suffering of those trapped in armed conflict. Our sincere appreciation goes to the men and women who work for life and for humankind.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Sobral Duarte (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I wish to congratulate Uruguay for having convened this important open debate.

(*spoke in English*)

Allow me to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/414), as well as the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch for their enlightening presentations.

It is unacceptable that in many countries hospitals are still being routinely bombed, raided, looted or burned to the ground. Brazil strongly condemns attacks and threats against the wounded and the sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel engaged in medical duties, their means of transportation and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities. The nature of warfare might have changed, but the rules of war have not.

For Brazil, the cause of such violations of international humanitarian law is not associated with shortcomings in the normative framework, but, rather, with a lack of respect for international humanitarian law by the main actors involved.

Geneva Conventions I and II of 1949, aimed at improving the situation of the wounded, sick and shipwrecked, stipulate the protection of medical and hospital personnel, preventing them from being attacked on the battlefield and ensuring the exercise of their activities. They also provide that the parties to the conflict may notify each other of the location of their fixed medical facilities and that the absence of such notification does not imply authorization to carry out attacks on these premises.

Under no circumstances should medical facilities be used for military purposes. In addition to the prohibition of targeted attacks on such facilities and their personnel, it is forbidden to use them as a shield to protect military equipment and personnel.

Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, which addresses non-international armed conflicts, contains similar provisions in protection of medical services and their personnel against attacks.

Brazil strongly supports seminal resolution 2286 (2016), which demands respect for international law and an end to impunity. Violations of humanitarian law must be considered war crimes, not just errors. They must be investigated impartially and the perpetrators held accountable.

In order to ensure the resolution's due implementation, it is important, among other initiatives, to align domestic legislation with obligations under international law, to train military personnel to minimize disruptions to health-care services, and to ensure that every transfer of weapons is accompanied by an assurance of respect for international humanitarian law.

Brazil is committed to the intergovernmental process aimed at strengthening respect for international humanitarian law and the possible creation of a forum of States on the subject. We regret that the discussions so far have been marked by excessive polarization.

In peacekeeping operations, the protection of humanitarian and health workers should be seen as a multidimensional task to be pursued by all mission components in the field and by both the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support at Headquarters. It is also essential to ensure that peacekeeping missions have the capabilities and resources they need to discharge their protection responsibilities as effectively as possible.

The World Health Organization has played an increasingly important role in humanitarian crises. Health workers are present in nearly 50 countries at high risk and are becoming the preferred targets in conflict situations. However, we are concerned with the

growing securitization of health issues. It is imperative that national health emergencies be treated as such, even when they arise from armed conflicts, and that the activities of international organizations occur only with the consent of the affected countries.

It is crucial that all parties to armed conflict facilitate safe and unimpeded passage for medical and humanitarian personnel. In this regard, we commend the brave work of all entities involved in providing much-needed care and protection for conflict-affected people around the globe.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. Castro López (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to begin with a few words of congratulations for and gratitude to the Uruguyan presidency of the Security Council.

Spain associates itself with the statement on the protection of civilians to be made by the observer of the European Union on behalf of its 28 member States.

I wish to devote this statement to attacks against doctors and hospitals, with a message to the Security Council on behalf of the five countries that promoted resolution 2286 (2016).

On behalf of Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Uruguay and my own country, Spain. Five countries, from five different regions of the world, came together a year ago united by a common goal: to stop attacks against health care in armed conflict.

Resolution 2286 (2016) is a unique resolution for different reasons: the scope of the resolution, the role of civil society, and the teamwork behind the scenes. For the first time ever, the Security Council focused on the increased difficulty of providing basic health care in conflict situations all around the world. As the Secretary-General has pointed out in his report (S/2017/414), hospitals are treated today as part of the battlefield rather than as sanctuaries.

Resolution 2286 (2016) did not merely seek to condemn attacks against hospitals or recall international humanitarian law provisions for protecting the wounded and those who care for them; it also lays out a series of practical steps to be taken by Member States in order to prevent those attacks. The resolution addresses such issues as humanitarian access, adequate training in international humanitarian law, adequate reporting, the fight against impunity and the need to hold investigations when violations occur. Resolution 2286 (2016) is unique because of the role played by civil society, from the early stages of its drafting to the present day. It is a resolution inspired by those who risk their lives to save others on the field on a daily basis.

We have all felt extremely concerned, frustrated and disappointed whenever the parties to an armed conflict fail to comply by international humanitarian law. However, for thousands of doctors, nurses and first-responders all around the world, frustration is not the issue. It is their ability to work — and ultimately their own lives — that are at stake here. That is why we need to speak up and react whenever attacks take place, demanding full, prompt and impartial investigations. In the words of an Uruguayan poet, Mario Benedetti, few things are more deafening than silence.

Finally, resolution 2286 (2016) was the product of a joint effort by five elected members of the Security Council from a purely humanitarian perspective. We did not seek to take sides or point fingers. Our goal was — and still is — to unite the Council and eventually get it to act whereever and whenever an attack takes place.

In that spirit, Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Uruguay and Spain stand together today to affirm that resolution 2286 (2016) can be only a first step in the right direction. If we are to see positive results over time, we need a strong engagement from all States Members of the United Nations, particularly from the members of the Security Council. We all need to lead by example, implementing resolution 2286 (2016) and holding others accountable when they fail to do so.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

I conclude by indicating that Spain will circulate in the Chamber a note with its national contribution in compliance with resolution 2286 (2016).

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Sandoval Mendiolea (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Uruguay for convening today's debate and express our appreciation for the statements made by the Secretary-General and representatives of civil society who have briefed us on the particular problems faced by humanitarian personnel dedicated to medical missions and health personnel.

It is necessary and appropriate for the Security Council to address this issue on a regular basis and that it reiterate its appeal to the United Nations membership and all parties to conflicts to respect the standards and principles related to the protection of civilians enshrined in international humanitarian law, human rights and international criminal law. Nevertheless, on many occasions, these appeals are ignored. They have therefore been insufficient to prevent or eliminate armed conflicts or to ensure the protection of civilians during conflicts, including in post-conflict stages. This is particularly worrying given the persistence of and increase in attacks against those involved in humanitarian operations and attacks on humanitarian convoys and medical facilities. All such attacks constitute war crimes.

Mexico strongly condemns this violence and calls on all parties to a conflict to respect and protect civilians, wounded and sick combatants and humanitarian workers alike. It is unacceptable that these personnel and facilities should be considered as parts of the battlefield rather than as sanctuaries for the wounded and the sick. The granting of humanitarian assistance can in no way be held hostage to political or military interests in an armed conflict, whether it be international or domestic conflict.

Similarly, given the devastating consequences of the use of explosives in densely populated areas, because of the difficulty of fully predicting and controlling their effects in the area around a detonation point — and therefore on people living there — we support efforts to adopt a political declaration on the issue. It is necessary and urgent to agree on a comprehensive response, since the consequences of the use of explosives in densely populated areas are experienced over the long term. We must prevent explosive weapons from destroying entire infrastructures, including hospitals and health centres.

In the light of this reality, the historic adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) represents an opportunity to step up and focus the efforts of Member States and the Organization to protect civilians. Accordingly, the Secretary-General's recommendations provide a basis for strengthening our response. It is also vital to seek to address the structural failings of the Organization in these cases. That is why we reiterate our appeal to the permanent members of the Security Council to follow the example of one of their own, France, and commit themselves not to veto Council decisions in cases that involve mass atrocities. Nearly a hundred countries have aligned themselves in support of the Franco-Mexican initiative in this regard. We therefore call on the members of the Security Council to implement the Security Council code of conduct proposed and strengthened by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group, so as to enhance the capacity and effectiveness of the Organization in the face of violations of international humanitarian law, human rights and international criminal law.

We welcome the increasing interest and attention being given to including better policies for the protection of civilians in the mandates of peacekeeping operations. The Security Council's condemnation is very important, but it should be accompanied by decisive actions to combat impunity in those cases. We also have to focus on addressing the underlying causes of conflict and on sustainable peace as a goal but also as a process and tool for ensuring international security and human security.

Civilians, and in particular women, boys and girls, continue to be the majority of the victims in armed conflicts. It is therefore essential to translate the political commitment of the Security Council into up-to-date and strengthened protection mechanisms, which in turn generate a tangible change in the situation on the ground. We therefore echo the recommendations of the Secretary-General and call on the Security Council to ensure that this issue remain at the heart of our definition of political strategies and solutions on its agenda.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Mr. Morales López (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, let me congratulate you, Madam President, on the excellent conduct of the work of the Security Council during Uruguay's presidency. We welcome the convening of today's open debate and the presidency's concept note (S/2017/365, annex) on the first anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of civilians. The note deals in particular with issues related to medical personnel and health care in the context of armed conflicts at a critical moment in international affairs in relation to humanitarian issues. We thank the Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Deputy Executive Director of Human Rights Watch for their statements.

Over the course of the last few years, we have witnessed the increasing degradation that the prolongation of conflicts has caused for the most vulnerable, such as boys, girls, women and the elderly. However, as stated in the report of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the health system, and medical missions in particular, are increasingly among the first victims of the war. In 2017 alone, more than 80 attacks on medical missions worldwide have been reported.

In that regard, my country shares the concern over the situation being faced by the civilian population in situations of armed conflict in some parts of the world and the recurring failure on behalf of the parties to recognize their obligation to respect and protect civilians. That demands more accountability when these parameters are violated, for that is not only a violation of the guiding principles of international humanitarian law, but also of humanity itself.

The policies of the Government in Colombia are aimed at ensuring that all State and non-State parties in armed conflicts respect their obligations to respect and protect health and humanitarian workers and related facilities, as well as the injured and sick. In that regard, we rely on what we have learned from experiences in the armed conflict that afflicted my country for more than five decades. Our accomplishments include the following.

We have achieved the continuous promotion of the norms of international humanitarian law for health personnel, the community in general and the armed actors. With the ongoing support of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Colombian Red Cross, we have made strides in this effort in many regions of the country. We maintain an updated record of violations against the Medical Mission and are making progress in establishing an observatory mechanism to follow up on those cases. That enabled us to establish corrective measures in terms of security and protection. We are also establishing an appropriate legal framework for dealing with this problem, which has included, for example, an ongoing programme for showing and posting the Medical Mission emblem by the Colombian Ministry of Health among health workers and the community in general.

There is crosscutting work at the national level to promote prevention of and responses to aggression against the Medical Mission, with the participation of universities, the national police, the Office of the General Prosecutor, military forces, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Colombian Red Cross, the National Protection Unit and the Ministry of Labour, among others.

The fulfilment of mandates, including the protection of civilians by the United Nations and other international organizations, should be accompanied by the political will of States. Such mandates include resolution 2286 (2016), which has brought us together today, and the guidelines established by resolution WHA55.13 at the fifty-fifth World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization. That resolution urges member States to vigorously promote and adopt relevant standards of international humanitarian law, to condemn attacks on health-care workers in humanitarian or health areas and to promote actions that ensure the security of health-care workers. Colombia has been implementing those mandates for many years. States' capacity for compliance must be encouraged by the international community, and any violation should be explained and the object of an impartial investigation.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the importance that Colombia attaches to the fact that the United Nations fully recognizes the work that national Governments are carrying out in the area of the protection of civilians. To that end, it needs objective, balanced and impartial information, which should include the identification of shortcomings and challenges, but also recognize the progress made in each country.

We believe without a doubt that the United Nations should continue to promote respect for international humanitarian law. In our view, this effort will lead to the effective protection of medical personnel and, to the extent possible, to a humanization of conflicts.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): We welcome the focus of today's debate on health care in armed conflict. It also illustrates a deeper problem we are facing: the erosion of the respect for international humanitarian law. Article 24 of the First Geneva Convention states:

> "Medical personnel exclusively engaged in the search for, or the collection, transport or treatment of the wounded or sick... shall be respected and protected in all circumstances."

In practice, however, this norm is increasingly violated in a systematic manner, as medical facilities and personnel are targeted in various conflicts around the world, often with the apparent intention to intensify the suffering of the civilian population. Killing one health-care worker can result in the lack of care for hundreds of people.

As in other areas, the case of Syria is particularly dramatic. Physicians for Human Rights has documented — as the Secretary-General has indicated in his opening remarks — over 400 attacks on medical facilities since 2011, as well as the deaths of hundreds of medical personnel. It is estimated that more than three quarters of Syrian doctors have fled since 2011. In Yemen, there have been 160 documented deadly attacks on hospitals and health professionals over the past two years alone.

One year ago, the Security Council strongly condemned attacks against medical facilities and personnel in conflict situations in its resolution 2286 (2016). However, this important text has had limited impact on the ground, and the Council has been unable to enforce its implementation in various conflict situations.

In his recent report on the protection of civilians (S/2017/414), the Secretary-General has called on States to intensify efforts to tackle the root causes of forced displacement. One such effort is the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes put forward by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group and currently supported by 112 States. The code of conduct is a political commitment from these States to take timely and decisive action aimed at preventing or ending atrocity crimes and not to vote against credible draft resolutions put forward to that end. The code of conduct gives a very important role to the Secretary-General in submitting relevant information to the Council and is therefore complementary to his prevention agenda.

Given the failure of other initiatives to enhance compliance with international humanitarian law, a key responsibility to do so falls on the Security Council. It has several tools at its disposal, ranging from support for national efforts to ensure accountability to referrals to the International Criminal Court. Its overall record, however, is unfortunately mixed, at best.

The people of Syria again have been at the receiving end of the failure of the Council to act. This has prompted the General Assembly to play a more active role in the area of accountability by creating the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria. This decision was a very important step forward to ensure that the crimes committed in Syria will not go unpunished and a landmark decision in the accountability work of this Organization. We look forward to the early appointment of the head of the Mechanism by the Secretary-General and to its financing from the regular budget of the United Nations.

Civilians will always suffer disproportionately in armed conflict. The most effective way to protect them is therefore avoiding armed conflict altogether. We view the effort to criminalize illegal war-making as an essential part of the conflict-prevention agenda and are therefore working, with many other States, towards ensuring the activation of the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court over the crime of aggression at the end of this year. We encourage all States to ratify the Kampala Amendments on the crime of aggression and look forward to jointly writing a chapter of history that is long overdue: criminalizing and thereby deterring illegal war-making.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Pakistan welcomes this open debate on the protection of civilians and health care in armed conflict. We thank the Secretary-General and the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their insightful briefings.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a basic tenet of international humanitarian law. The 1949 Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols contain specific rules to protect civilians. Yet, despite an established normative framework, compliance is unfortunately sporadic and accountability mechanisms are weak or, in many cases, nonexistent. Non-combatants continue to be treated as fair game by warring parties seeking to further their strategic interests. Collateral damage is still considered a regrettable but inevitable byproduct of conflict. As a result, the tapestry of armed conflict is increasingly being coloured by the suffering of civilian populations.

As the seething fires of armed conflict rage across the world, the international community has confronted the grim reality of growing civilian casualties as well

as an ever-greater need for humanitarian assistance and the protection of people displaced by conflict. The plight of the vulnerable, including women and children, remains particularly acute. As the Secretary-General notes in his latest report (S/2017/414), more than 20 million people in conflict situations, including 1.4 million children, are on the brink of famine. This tragedy is compounded by a less-than-adequate global response to the need to address the suffering of civilians in armed conflict.

Amid the dark shadows of war and conflict, essential health services, including hospitals and medical personnel, play a critical role both as providers of vital life support and sustainers of hope and optimism. Any attack on medical facilities and staff puts lives at risk and exacerbates suffering. It is therefore not only an egregious breach of international law but a betrayal of humankind itself. It is unfortunate that we have witnessed a spate of recent attacks on medical facilities in conflict situations by both State and non-State actors. The culture of impunity for such crimes must end.

The Security Council's landmark resolution 2286 (2016) speaks to that imperative by unequivocally condemning attacks or threats against medical and humanitarian personnel who are exclusively engaged in medical duties. The task we have now is to translate that political resolve into tangible action. As a first step, all parties to an armed conflict should unequivocally affirm that health care must be protected in compliance with their obligations under international law, in particular humanitarian law. Criminal prosecutions and other forms of accountability for the perpetrators of attacks on health-service providers are equally essential. The parties to an armed conflict should also ensure safe, unimpeded passage and sustained access for humanitarian personnel. Human misery cannot be mortgaged or sacrificed at the altar of political objectives.

The protection of civilians must also be prioritized in United Nations peacekeeping operations. As one of the world's leading contributors of troops to United Nations operations, my country has proudly and conscientiously performed the task of protecting civilians in various parts of the world, including in missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur, the Central African Republic and Liberia. Based on our diverse and rich experience, we underscore the critical importance of troop-contributing countries to the process, not just in designing mandates but also in their implementation, review, renewal or change, especially in cases where the situation on the ground has deteriorated rapidly. While the fundamental principles of peacekeeping are not an impediment to mandates for the protection of civilians, the primary responsibility for protecting all civilians nonetheless rests with the host countries. The clear distinction between the established norm of the protection of civilians and the evolving concept of the responsibility to protect must therefore be maintained.

Above all, the goal of protecting civilians is best served by preventing the outbreak of armed conflicts in the first place. That entails addressing the root causes of conflicts, finding inclusive political solutions to disputes and seeking peaceful settlements. We believe that the Secretary-General's call for a surge in diplomacy for peace represents a reinforcement and strengthening of that approach. A culture of prevention is, after all, the best assurance we can have for sustainable and enduring peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Hungary.

Ms. Bogyay (Hungary): I would like to thank the Uruguayan presidency for organizing today's open debate, as well as for the briefings by the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch.

Hungary aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union, and I would like to add a few words in my national capacity.

We share the view that the issue of health care in armed conflict should be addressed in the wider context of the protection of civilians, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian access, and the strengthening of compliance with international humanitarian law. We also firmly believe that the protection of civilians should be integral to every United Nations peace operation that has such a mandate. It is important to maintain continuing consultations and enhance communication between the Security Council, the Secretariat and troop- and police-contributing countries about possible gaps in mission mandates.

Hungary considers respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of victims of armed conflicts to be extremely important. Since today thousands of civilians are not only suffering from the effects of armed conflict but are also becoming targets for the military strategies of the parties to those

conflicts, the international community must intensify all its efforts to enhance respect for international humanitarian law. Resolution 2286 (2016) sent the strong message that any attack on medical personnel and facilities in conflict situations is absolutely unacceptable. But sadly, while we regularly call the international community's attention to the protection of civilians and to atrocities committed against innocent people and medical personnel, we are all aware that the daily facts reveal hardly any changes for the better.

The protection of medical care in conflict and humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable populations must continue to be a priority. In cases where international efforts fail and atrocity crimes, including attacks on health-care institutions and medical personnel, are committed, accountability is crucial. Hungary is committed to supporting institutions dedicated to ensuring accountability and establishing an environment of respect for international humanitarian law, such as international courts and tribunals and other mechanisms. In that spirit, Hungary made a voluntary contribution of €50,000 towards the establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. As a member of the Human Rights Council, Hungary will prioritize working to prevent atrocity crimes and to promote tools already at the international community's disposal that can help to achieve an effective and timely response.

We would also like to affirm the relevance to today's discussion of the concept of the responsibility to protect. With a view to ensuring more timely and decisive responses on the part of the Security Council, Hungary participated actively in creating the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes formulated by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, which has already been signed by 112 Member States.

Hungary believes that the best way to protect civilians is by preventing armed conflicts. The United Nations should use every tool at its disposal for achieving the early warnings and political mediation that are needed to prevent outbreaks of hostilities and to de-escalate them when they occur. In that regard, we wholeheartedly support the Secretary-General's recommendation for a surge in the use of diplomacy for peace and for placing prevention at the centre of our joint efforts. Hungary fully shares that vision, and my Government has therefore made voluntary contributions in 2016 and 2017 in support of the work of the Department of Political Affairs in preventive diplomacy and mediation.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Counsel and Head of the Humanitarian Affairs Section of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Fernandez-Zincke (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the Council for organizing today's timely debate.

(*spoke in English*)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Christine Beerli, and the Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch, Bruno Stagno Ugarte, for their contributions to this debate.

The protection of civilians and health care in armed conflict continues to be of profound concern. We welcome the focus of today's debate on the topic and the opportunity to take stock of the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) one year after its adoption. The European Union has been from the outset and continues to be a strong supporter of that landmark resolution. We welcome the strong message it sends that any violation of international humanitarian law committed against medical personnel and facilities in conflict situations is completely unacceptable.

We are, however, concerned by the troubling developments on the ground. Attacks on medical facilities and personnel in conflicts, such as in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and South Sudan, continue. In some instances, those are carried out in full knowledge of the exclusively medical or humanitarian nature of the facilities being attacked and in most cases without any action being taken to investigate and counter

those attacks. We continue to be equally concerned by the lack of safe and unimpeded passage of medical personnel, assets and supplies in numerous instances, whose compounded consequences on the health of civilians, including children, are devastating.

We must strengthen our resolve to implement the commitments we have made and to stop medical facilities and personnel from being targeted, in clear breach of international humanitarian law. It is a war crime to intentionally attack hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected.

The EU is committed to ensuring the full implementation of resolution 2286 (2016). At the World Humanitarian Summit last year, the EU made the commitment to promoting and enhancing efforts to respect and protect medical personnel, transports and facilities, as well as humanitarian relief personnel and assets against attacks, threats or other violent acts. The EU also acknowledges the Secretary-General's recommendations made in 2016, pursuant to resolution 2286 (2016), and concurs with the recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/414) in that respect, including on the need to share best practices and lessons learned and ensure rapid, complete, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access.

The blatant disregard and refusal in many cases of the parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law continue to be one of the most critical challenges for the protection of medical care in conflicts, as well as globally for the protection of civilians. That problem is further exacerbated by the escalation of urban warfare in recent years, and the use of weapons with wide-area impacts is destroying critical infrastructure and killing civilians, including medical and humanitarian personnel, in virtually all conflicts. The EU strongly condemns such violations and is committed to consistently speaking out for global respect and compliance with international humanitarian law and ensuring safe, rapid, full and unimpeded humanitarian access to those who are most in need of assistance.

The EU is a major advocate for international humanitarian law, humanitarian principles and human rights, and continues to implement the EU guidelines on international humanitarian law. The EU fosters global respect for and compliance with international humanitarian law through a variety of means, including political dialogue, demarches or public statements about specific conflicts, restrictive measures, sanctions and cooperation with the United Nations and relevant regional organizations.

However, compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law needs to be further strengthened and enhanced. The EU and its member States remain committed to the Swiss/ICRC initiative on strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law and calls on all Member States to participate constructively in that process. The EU's long-standing involvement in ending impunity and strengthening accountability includes the EU's support to the International Criminal Court. The new EU global strategy explicitly commits the EU to promoting international criminal law and the universality of the Rome Statute.

The EU and its member States are also committed to continuing their efforts to promote the dissemination of and training in international humanitarian law and human rights, both inside and outside the European Union, as well as supporting relevant States and non-State actors in implementing or reinforcing context-specific measures to enhance physical safety of medical personnel and infrastructure.

The EU will also continue to place protection of civilians at the core of its humanitarian response and to support the international humanitarian system in ensuring the centrality of protection in humanitarian action. Having recognized that a disproportionate number of internally displaced persons and those in conflict zones are women, we will apply a gender perspective to ensure that both women's and men's needs are taken into consideration to enable a targeted humanitarian response.

States bear the primary responsibility for providing protection for their citizens. However, the protection of civilians is also a main task of United Nations peacekeeping and is often decisive for its success and legitimacy. Today, 10 of 16 peacekeeping missions have mandates encompassing the protection of civilians.

To conclude, the European Union and its member States remain committed to the full implementation of resolution 2286 (2016). All States may count on our support for reinforcing the protection of the wounded and sick, as well as medical personnel, facilities and equipment. We will also continue our global support for promoting compliance with international humanitarian

law and the protection of civilians. And we call on all States to join us in that effort.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Kickert (Austria): Allow me at the outset to thank the Uruguayan presidency for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians.

Austria fully aligns itself with the statement just delivered by the observer of the European Union and those still to be delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians and the Human Security Network. In our national capacity, we would like to highlight some additional points we deem especially important.

Enhanced respect for international law, especially international humanitarian law, is of paramount importance, as highlighted by the Secretary-General and the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross at the outset of the debate. Austria therefore welcomes the attention the Secretary-General gives in his report (S/2017/414) to the massive harm, destruction and negative long-term consequences of explosive weapons with wide-area impact when used in populated areas. The available data shows that 2016 was the worst year recorded within the past six years for civilian deaths resulting from explosive weapons. We therefore strongly support the clear and unequivocal call of the Secretary-General on all State and non-State parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and appreciate his encouragement regarding the efforts led by Austria on the development of a political declaration on that issue.

We also share the Secretary-General's concern regarding the detrimental impact of conflict on education and medical care. In too many conflict situations, attacks on schools, teachers and students or the use of schools and universities for military purposes are not uncommon. Similarly, we note the numerous incidences of direct and indiscriminate attacks against humanitarian and medical personnel and objects. Hence we wholeheartedly support the call for the endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration and the recommendations presented by the Secretary-General on implementing resolution 2286 (2016) to protect medical care in armed conflict.

On a different note, we need to further operationalize the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Against that background, we continue to advocate for Member States' endorsement of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. Austria, from this year on, organizes two operational-level courses per year, certified by the United Nations, on the protection of civilians. Again this year, we will host and support one training-of-trainers course on training materials concerning protection of civilians and related areas, developed by the Integrated Training Service together with interested States, among them Austria. Only adequately trained peacekeepers are able to effectively implement their mandates and protect civilians.

Let me finish by thanking Secretary-General Guterres for not only linking the protection of civilians to the issue of forced displacement, but also for not forgetting the plight of internally displaced persons (IDPs). We fully share the view that IDPs have received inadequate attention from their Governments and global leaders, as stated in the report (see S/2017/414, para 61), and we certainly do agree that we need to use the twentieth anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, in 2018, in order to advance this important issue.

In conclusion, let me repeat that Austria shares the Secretary-General's assessment that protection is a whole-of-UN responsibility. We also call on all States to continue in good faith the ongoing discussions in Geneva about ways and means to enhance the implementation of international humanitarian law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Prieto (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank the Uruguayan presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflicts. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres; the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Christine Beerli; and the Deputy Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, for being present here today.

The Security Council, through resolution 2286 (2016) — which specifically addresses the subject of this open debate — "strongly condemns acts of violence, attacks and threats against the wounded and

sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medial duties", and "deplores the long-term consequences of such attacks for the civilian population and the health-care systems of the countries concerned". That document also reiterates the relevant legal framework and calls upon all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international law, including respect for the rules of international humanitarian law.

In that regard, Peru is party to the Geneva Conventions, which declare illegal any attacks against hospitals or workers providing medical assistance, which includes convoys providing humanitarian assistance as well as to all those who bear distinguishing marks. We call on the international community to effectively enforce that ban. Peru considers that the sacrificial and risky work of protection developed by humanitarian agencies and workers should be the object of the highest recognition by the international community.

Resolution 2286 (2016) also requires Member States to take measures with regard to the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflicts, such as facilitating the safe passage of personnel and supplies to those in need; preventing attacks against medical services in armed conflicts; and implementing practical protection measures when planning and executing their operations. In that vein, and in line with the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report in document S/2016/447, for more than 20 years Peru has been training its armed forces personnel in accordance with the applicable norms of international humanitarian law. Incorporating recognized norms into personnel doctrines has allowed the peacekeepers that Peru contributes to peacekeeping operations to be soundly prepared in areas of international humanitarian law, which translates into impeccable performance on the ground.

Peru encourages the active involvement of the Security Council in the protection of civilians affected by armed conflict. Only strong action by the Security Council is appropriate in that regard. Attacks on medical facilities and humanitarian workers are considered war crimes. The perpetrators must be brought to justice, because impunity encourages conflict. In the light of that, Peru recognizes the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court and hopes for its universalization. Likewise, we are in the process of ratifying the Kampala Amendments. We call on States to comply with the relevant obligations under international law to put an end to impunity and to hold those responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law accountable for their acts.

Peru commits to work with other States to address outstanding issues in this area, in order to ensure accountability, punish those responsible and improve the protection of the wounded and sick and of health and humanitarian personnel, their equipment and means of transport, hospitals and other health facilities.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to begin by thanking the Uruguayan presidency for convening this open debate. I would also like to express my gratitude to the briefers for their valuable input in this debate.

I align myself with the statement made earlier by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Attacks against medical workers and facilities and the humanitarian convoys delivering medical supplies have increased since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016). In 2016 alone, attacks on health-care facilities, health workers, ambulances and patients increased in 23 countries under these conditions. Those attacks are taking place in various places around the world; but in terms of frequency and ferocity, they are more prevalent in the Middle East.

We condemn all the attacks that have taken place against medical and humanitarian staff, facilities and means of transport throughout the world, especially in Palestine, Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria.

It is difficult to understand how it is possible that, at a time of high-tech and high-precision modern bombs, so-called mistakes could happen so frequently, with medical facilities and personnel in areas of armed conflict being targeted. Hospitals are public facilities. Their locations are well known by all parties to the conflict, and necessary protocols are in place to avoid bombing them. Unfortunately, such incidents keep occurring, and the perpetrators continue to claim that they are simply mistakes. Tragedies such as the bombing of the hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan in October 2015 are declared mistakes and end without any military personnel involved being convicted.

In 2016 alone, the Palestine Red Crescent Society reported 416 instances of violence or interference with its ambulances by Israeli forces or settlers, which resulted in the injury of 162 emergency workers, damage to 108 ambulances and the denial of access to health care in 146 cases. That is on top of the illegal blockade against the Palestinians that has continued for more than a decade, denying them their basic human rights, including access to health care, by the Israeli regime, all unabated.

Since March 2015, the Saudi-led aggression in Yemen has led to many well-documented war crimes. They involve the destruction of much civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities, and that aggression continues under the watch of the Security Council. Worse still, that unfortunate misadventure is enjoying the ever-increasing military, logistical and training support of the United States and its Air Force.

Greater efforts are needed to document and analyse every incident that affects the security and the well-being of health-care workers and facilities and ensure that impartial, independent and prompt investigations are carried out, and those found responsible for such acts be brought to justice. The Council must abandon its double standards with respect to bombing humanitarian and health facilities and workers. By highlighting some attacks and remaining silent on others, the Council discredits its own resolutions, especially resolution 2286 (2016).

Finally, I would like to conclude by paying tribute to the valuable work carried out by the many health-care workers who perform in the context of armed conflicts.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Indonesia thanks the Uruguay presidency for convening this open debate on a highly important topic. We also thank the Secretary-General; Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch, for their comments.

We associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf on the Non-Aligned Movement.

I should first like to begin by reminding us all of our obligation under international humanitarian law to distinguish between civilian populations and combatants, and the obligation to do everything feasible to avoid attacks on civilians, civilian property and medical personnel and their facilities in situations of armed conflict. Resolution 2286 (2016) and others before it have called for effective measures to safeguard medical and humanitarian personnel and their equipment. Yet it is deeply disturbing that not only have attacks against them increased, but State authorities in a number of cases are unable to prevent, counter and investigate them properly, owing to a lack of capacity.

At this important juncture, I would like to share some important points pertaining to our topic today.

First is the primary responsibility of States to protect the population. Indonesia believes that the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the host country. In that regard, all parties to armed conflict must uphold that principle and fully comply with the obligations applicable to them under international humanitarian law related to the protection of civilians and medical personnel in armed conflict.

The second point is the nexus between the protection of civilians and counter-terrorism activities. In the context of peacekeeping, the operating environments for United Nations peacekeeping missions have become more dangerous with the threats posed by armed groups and violent extremists. There has to be a better focus on increasing the situational awareness and response capabilities of peacekeepers through better predeployment training and adequate protection equipment, including in combat first aid, medical evacuation and casualty evacuation. All of this is covered in our peacekeeping training in Indonesia.

The Security Council also needs to engage better with the relevant State and non-State entities to deter violent extremists and terrorists. However, that situation should not be a justification for peacekeepers to engage in counter-terrorism, which can have a very different dimension. Being perceived as neutral and credible actors is essential for Blue Helmets to discharge their tasks. We fully agree with the Secretary-General's assessment in his report on the work of the Organization (A/71/1) that peacekeeping operations should not engage in counter-terrorism activities, which was also stressed in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446).

Third is the close relationship between the protection of civilians and health care. Provision of sufficient and quality medical and health facilities is

required for United Nations peacekeeping operations, as well as for combatants. That is in the interests of all, not just for personnel and parties to conflict, but also for people besieged in an armed conflict. That is then all the more reason for the United Nations to establish standards and facilitate improved medical capabilities and facilities in armed conflict.

The fourth point is the improvement of medical care to respond to emergency situations. Some situations of armed conflicts and peacekeeping missions have experienced challenges in consistently responding to medical emergencies and in evacuating casualties. Indonesia stresses the need to ensure the swift and safe passage for injured, wounded and sick peacekeepers, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties.

Our fifth point is the increasingly important and positive role of women peacekeepers in community-building and preventive and primary health care, as well as secondary health care such as post-traumatic care and pandemic cases in conflict areas. Our experience and training of peacekeepers in Indonesia has shown that Indonesian women peacekeepers are far more effective in gaining the trust and confidence of the community, particularly women and children. That is also especially evident in addressing health issues involving serious cases of sexual violence and exploitation. We recognize that both the United Nations and its Member States must do more to further strengthen the role of women in peacekeeping, as clearly outlined in the London Communiqué of 2016.

The United Nations system should continue its efforts to improve measures to help protect civilians, health and humanitarian personnel and their facilities. The improvement of health care in conflict situations is an important element to build trust and hope for a better future. The life of civilians is at stake.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Mr. Logar (Slovenia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Human Security Network, a cross-regional network composed of Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Panama, Switzerland, Thailand, South Africa as an observer State, and my own country, Slovenia.

I should like to start by thanking Uruguay for convening this important debate today. I would also like to express our appreciation to Secretary-General António Guterres, Ms. Beerli and Mr. Ugarte for their comprehensive briefings.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is of the utmost importance to the members of the Human Security Network. Resolution 2286 (2016), which was adopted one year ago, specifically recognized the particular challenges faced by humanitarian personnel engaged in medical duties and by medical personnel. It was encouraging to see the wide support for the resolution, which reaffirms, inter alia, the need for all parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as applicable, and to facilitate the activities of humanitarian organizations, which adhere to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in the provision of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance.

We continue to note with great concern that, according to the latest report of the Secretary General (S/2017/414), attacks on medical personnel and on humanitarian personnel engaged in performing medical duties, as well as on medical facilities and patients, continue at an alarming rate. The Human Security Network strongly condemns all violence, attacks and threats against wounded and sick humanitarian workers engaged in medical duties, as well as against medical and health personnel and facilities, and deplores the long-term consequences of such attacks for the population and health-care systems of the countries concerned. We therefore encourage the parties and mediators to consider including provisions on the protection of medical personnel and facilities in the drafting of peace agreements, including in the definition or principles of ceasefire and in security and monitoring provisions, where relevant.

The Secretary General's report provides yet another sobering testimony of grave situations civilians face in a number of conflict-affected countries. All of those situations need to be urgently and effectively addressed, according to the Human Security Network. Focus must be placed on enhancing protection on the ground. We see that armed conflicts are increasingly waged in urban areas. Therefore we must ensure that the civilian population is adequately protected. However, many parties have not only shown a blatant disregard for the principles of distinction, proportionality and necessity in the conduct of hostility, but have deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure. We therefore share the

Secretary-General's concern regarding the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and support his call for further measures to address that issue.

The Human Security Network advocates a people-centred, holistic approach to security. That includes a focus not only on the protection of civilians once a conflict situation occurs, but also on conflict prevention in a broader sense. We therefore share the Secretary-General's view that, in the long term, the best way to protect civilians is to address the root causes of conflicts, build sustainable peace, promote human rights and rule of law, strengthen governance and democratic institutions and invest in inclusive and sustainable development.

Ensuring respect by all parties to a conflict for international humanitarian and human rights law is the first necessary step to enhance the protection of civilians. States must comply with their obligation to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded access to humanitarian relief for civilians in need and the freedom of movement of humanitarian personnel. All parties to every armed conflict bear the responsibility to allow and facilitate access for the delivery of such assistance.

In addition to enhancing compliance with international law and strengthening national protection capacities, we recognize the major role of the United Nations peacekeeping operations, the majority of which are mandated with protection-related tasks, in the protection of civilians, including in the area of prevention. In that regard, the Human Security Network underlines the importance of clear and achievable mandates with sufficient resources and capabilities to fulfil the protection mandate.

Accountability is a key element in the protection of civilians. States must comply with their obligations under international law to hold accountable perpetrators of crime committed against civilians. The Human Security Network stresses the usefulness of commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions in investigating and substantiating alleged violations of international law, in particular international humanitarian law and human rights law. We also underscore the crucial role of international courts and tribunals in ensuring accountability. When States are unwilling or unable to bring perpetrators to justice, a referral to the International Criminal Court is a complementary means to avoid impunity and restore dignity to survivors of atrocities, their families and communities. We reiterate the importance of States' cooperation in that regard.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Buffin (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium supports the statement made by the observer of the European Union, as well as the statement made by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

I would like to address more specifically the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of health services in armed conflict.

First, on behalf of my country, I would like to express my indignation at the number and intensity of attacks on health services around the world. We are all familiar with the situation in Syria, where, according to various United Nations and non-governmental organization (NGO) reports, there is a sustained and targeted campaign against medical facilities and personnel. But that intolerable practice of targeting those who put themselves at risk to come to the aid of victims is not limited to that country; on the contrary, the phenomenon is much more widespread.

We welcome the project undertaken by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement — Hea'th Care in Danger — to combat the problem of violence against patients, health workers, medical facilities and vehicles, and to make access to health care and the provision of health care in armed conflict and other emergency situations safer. The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition — a group comprising of more than 30 NGOs — has published a report on the subject, which was recently presented to the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations at a seminar on Syria and Yemen. The Coalition has compiled a list of attacks perpetrated on health care personnel and facilities in no fewer than 23 countries. We must all support this vital effort to list and document such incidents.

Attacks on health services are not just an ethical or moral issue; their scope is much broader. We must not forget the doubly devastating effect of such attacks on already fragile health-care systems and, by extension, their effect on vulnerable people such as the elderly, the sick, the pregnant women and the children who depend

on those systems. There is also an adverse effect on international law, which we have all pledged to uphold. International humanitarian law is slowly being eroded because of serious repeated and often unpunished violations of the obligations it imposes on all parties to armed conflict. It is our shared responsibility to reverse that trend, by making tangible commitments and by taking concrete action.

I would like to make the following three points on resolution 2286 (2016).

First, although the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) is a good starting point, it is by no means the end result. More must be done, starting with the implementation of the resolution itself. We call on the States Members of the United Nations to work individually and collectively to implement the Secretary-General's recommendations in a consensual manner.

Secondly, we must make better use of existing instruments to monitor, document and investigate serious violations of international humanitarian law. In that regard, Belgium fully supports the initiative of the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism for Syria, both politically and financially. We encourage Member States to do the same. Investigating, prosecuting and punishing serious violations of international humanitarian law — in short, combating impunity — is crucial to deterrence and to preventing the commission of new crimes, which is essential to sustaining peace. States have a central role to play in that regard.

Thirdly, I would like to recall the plight of children and young people and on the devastating impact of conflict on their education. It is estimated that 246 million children live in conflict zones. Like attacks on health services and personnel, attacks on schools are on the rise in many conflict situations. But attacks on schools not only claim the lives of innocent children and young people, they also jeopardize the education and the future of those who survive. Therefore, Belgium has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and invites other Member States to do the same. In that regard, we would like to call on the members of the Security Council to consider the possibility of drafting and adopting, along the lines of resolution 2286 (2016), a resolution with a specific focus on attacks on the education sector.

In conclusion, I would like to commend Human Rights Watch, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross, on their professionalism, courage and the tireless efforts of their staff, and all local health-care workers who undertake remarkable work, despite the risks and challenges they face. It is essential for all parties to a conflict to respect at all times the impartiality and neutrality of such actors.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): I would like to thank the Uruguayan presidency for convening this important open debate and the briefers for sharing their valuable insights.

Germany fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and with the statement to be delivered by Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends. Germany also supports the vision outlined by the Secretary-General in his report on strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflicts (S/2017/414).

I will make a few short remarks in my national capacity.

First, I would like to point out a deeply worrying trend. Many non-State armed groups flagrantly violate international humanitarian law by failing to protect civilians and blocking humanitarian access. What is equally troubling is that certain States do the same. All States are bound to protect civilians under international humanitarian law. We therefore urge all States and all parties to armed conflict to make the protection of civilians a priority. We call on this Council to find ways to enhance compliance with international humanitarian law and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their violations.

Secondly, the protection of civilians must never be a secondary concern in peacekeeping operations. Their protection must always be a prime consideration and a central element in the operation's mandate. Of course, the most effective way to protect civilians is to end the conflict by finding a sustainable political solution. That is why we have scaled up our mediation and mediation support activities in recent years. In order to protect civilians, the mission must be equipped with the necessary capabilities and resources to keep civilians safe, including resources to provide medical assistance. Ultimately, that is not just the responsibility of the Council and the United Nations, but of every troop- and police-contributing country.

Thirdly, we must protect humanitarian and medical missions. To help survivors of violent conflicts, it is essential that we have full, rapid, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access. However, despite the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), we witnessed an increase in attacks against medical and humanitarian personnel in 2016. That trend is unacceptable. The international community must do everything in its power to ensure the safety and security of those personnel. Conflict parties must abide by rules of engagement to protect medical personnel and facilities.

Germany champions the protection of civilians through all stages of crisis.

First, we have substantially increased our crisis prevention efforts and capacities, including early warning systems and mediation.

Secondly, by upholding international humanitarian and human rights law, we promote respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. Furthermore, we vigorously fight impunity and support accountability. In the case of Syria, for example, we support the recently established International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law, as well as the work of the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry.

Thirdly, our projects on the ground in conflict areas are geared towards the protection of civilians. For instance, we invest in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration projects in many conflict areas and support humanitarian mine action and other initiatives to decrease the impact of small arms, light weapons and improvised explosive devices.

Fourthly, in our military contribution to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, we have made the protection of civilians an important element in our pre-deployment training.

The protection of civilians in conflict must be our highest priority. If the international community fails to deliver here, we fail to achieve the purpose for which this institution was created.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Ms. Lind (Estonia): Deliberate attacks on civilians are war crimes, and they are simply unacceptable. It is with a heavy heart that we look at the increasing numbers of incidents placing civilians, including medical and humanitarian personnel, under direct attack in armed conflicts. We are witnessing obstacles placed to obstruct the delivery of medical equipment and people in need who are not receiving necessary medical treatment.

Over the past years, we have seen a growing number of violations of international humanitarian law. In this vein I thank the Uruguayan presidency for convening the today's open debate to address this issue.

Estonia also aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Resolution 2286 (2016), adopted unanimously by the Security Council, was a landmark decision addressing the grave situation that medical and humanitarian personnel face today. It is important to underline that they are under the protection of international humanitarian law and that States have obligations to respect that. In that regard, Estonia will continue to support the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016).

It is without doubt States that have the primary responsibility to ensure the protection of their own people. For that, we have to start with conflict prevention. Respect for civilian populations and health care in armed conflicts must be present at all times. In order to bring that into practice, Estonia has ratified the main instruments of international humanitarian law with respect to the protection of civilians and has introduced the necessary domestic regulations for their enforcement. We have taken it to heart to ensure that our personnel do not violate international law when carrying out their obligations in Estonia or on a mission. The Estonian Defence Forces are provided with training on the obligations for the protection of civilians under international humanitarian law. That includes basic overviews of the field, briefings on rules of engagement before every deployment and advanced training in international humanitarian law.

Perpetrators must be brought to justice. States must ensure that those responsible do not operate with impunity. In that respect, let me underline the importance of accountability and the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in cases where investigations or prosecutions at the national level are not possible. We encourage States to cooperate with the ICC and the Security Council to refer matters to the ICC.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Roet (Israel): For too long, the world has witnessed the unfolding of bloody conflicts, which have led to some of the worst humanitarian crises in history. From Yemen to Libya, from Somalia to South Sudan, infrastructure is destroyed and civilians are trapped — pawns to illegitimate regimes and targets of terrorists eager to kill. Most recently, innocent civilians in Manchester have fallen victim to such inhumane attacks. Israel stands in solidarity with the people of Great Britain. In the face of human rights abuses, the United Nations cannot remain silent. Protecting civilians and health-care access in conflict zones must be our top priority.

Nowhere have attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure caused more damage than in Syria — devastation that has shaken the whole world to its core. Over the past six years, the Syrian regime has led a brutal campaign against its own population. Al-Assad has deployed chemical weapons, including the recent sarin attack in Khan Shaykhun. He has authorized siege warfare and hanged thousands of prisoners, with shocking reports of his plans to dispose of their bodies in a large crematorium, seeking to hide the atrocities committed.

The Syrian regime has even resorted to destroying hospitals and removing essential medical aid from humanitarian convoys, leaving almost 13 million people with no access to treatment. As we heard from the Secretary-General this morning, over 400 hospitals and medical facilities were hit last year, which forced half of Syria's hospitals to close treatment wings or shut down completely. Eight hundred medical staff were tragically killed in 2016, and most of those remaining have been forced to flee. In Madaya, following months of siege, al-Assad and his allies not only starved the town's 42,000 residents, but also proceeded to demolish all but one hospital.

Al-Assad's main ally and beneficiary, Iran, is an accomplice to those crimes. Terror militias backed and financed by Iran, most notably Hezbollah, operate in Syria, bolster its brutal regime and commit unspeakable atrocities, trapping innocents in the crossfire.

The Syrian people have called desperately for the world's help. Despite lacking diplomatic ties with Syria, Israel has responded to that call. Our medical team and first responders have treated countless Syrians — no questions asked. We do so because we firmly believe that it is the right thing to do. Earlier this year, a sniper hit 23-year-old Raji in the face. With his upper jaw, cheekbones and right eye gone, this Syrian person knew that he had to seek treatment in Israel. Using 3-D printing technology, the Israeli doctors reconstructed Raji's face, completing one of the first-ever treatments of this kind. Under Israel's care, Raji is now close to full recovery.

Israel's Western Galilee Hospital in Nahariya has treated 1,600 Syrians over four years. Doctors and nurses are committed to improving physical and mental health, ensuring that patients feel at home and restoring their sense of humanity. When it comes to saving lives, Israel knows no borders.

Israel's northern hospitals must often perform life-saving procedures under threat from Hizbullah. In 2006, that terrorist organization fired almost 900 rockets into the city of Nahariya alone. Hizbullah is an internationally designated terrorist group, notorious for destroying critical infrastructure and conceiving of new ways to harm civilians. It has amassed over 100,000 missiles and point them straight towards Israel, in clear violation of resolutions 1710 (2006) and 1559 (2004). As we have cautioned time and again in this Chamber, Hizbullah has transformed southern Lebanon's Shiite villages into terror outposts, intending to harm Israel. Rocket launchers sit by schools and hospitals, and living rooms store missiles. Today, Hizbullah has recruited a third of the civilians within these villages, strengthening its terror framework. By launching attacks on Israel out of Lebanese population centres, Hizbullah is committing a double war crime.

Lebanon continues to ignore the Council's demand to take responsibility, restore order and "exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory". Lebanese President Aoun recently described Hizbullah as essential to Lebanese defence. Just this week, Lebanon's Foreign Secretary distanced himself from the Riyadh Declaration at the Arab-Islamic-American Summit criticizing the terror group.

Hamas is another internationally recognized terrorist organization guilty of a double war crime. At the expense of the people of Gaza, Hamas exploits international humanitarian aid to build rockets and terror tunnels, and even base its headquarters among civilians. During the 2014 conflict, Hamas stored its lethal arsenal, launched deadly attacks and created a

makeshift military command centre in Gaza's Wafa Hospital. These terrorists even built an entrance inside Wafa to Hamas's vast terror tunnel network.

The senseless attacks on civilians, the use of human shields and destruction of health-care facilities must end. The Security Council must stand against these abuses. While Israel supports and co-sponsored resolution 2286 (2016), the issue of human shields should not have been omitted from that text.

Millions in Syria, throughout the Middle East and around the globe look to the United Nations to end the carnage. Our goal, our duty, is to end all war. But until then, the international community must answer the call and guarantee the protection of civilians around the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Lauber (Switzerland): I am pleased to take the floor on behalf of members of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Uruguay and my own country, Switzerland. The Group of Friends thanks Uruguay for organizing today's open debate and the briefers for their statements.

Deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians are widespread in many armed conflicts. A growing number of parties to armed conflicts openly disregard long-established rules of international humanitarian law, especially with regard to the conduct of hostilities and the protection of civilians. The despicable trend whereby medical facilities, personnel and their means of transport and the wounded and sick are deliberately targeted, so as to violently deprive civilian populations of vital services, has to be reversed. Access restrictions and assaults on humanitarian and medical workers impede the delivery of urgently needed assistance. The number of deaths of humanitarian and medical workers to date this year, one of the deadliest on record, should horrify us all. Therefore, it is with a sense of urgency that we must promote respect for international humanitarian law. As highlighted in the Secretary General's report (S/2017/414), all States have an obligation to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances.

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), condemning attacks against medical units and personnel in armed conflict by the Council in May 2016, with a large number of sponsors, was an important signal that, despite the numerous violations observed in recent years, international law is clear. The wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities, must be respected and protected. This is an issue of great concern to the international community.

The Group of Friends acknowledges the Secretary General's recommendations on implementing resolution 2286 (2016) and urges States to implement them, in accordance with their national legal framework. Member States have the primary responsibility to ensure that proper legal, policy and operational frameworks are in place to ensure full implementation of international law. We call on all Member States to take action on the Secretary-General's recommendations which will allow for the full implementation of resolution 2286 (2016).

The Group of Friends condemns attacks against schools, which, as civilian objects, enjoy protection against direct attacks and the effects of such attacks under the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law. When schools and children are targeted, the future is attacked. In this regard, the Group of Friends takes note of the Safe Schools Declaration, currently endorsed by 64 countries, aiming at the protection and continuation of education in armed conflict.

The Group of Friends underlines the importance of deterring violations of international humanitarian law and promoting accountability. States must make greater efforts for systematic data collection, analysis and reporting on incidents, including on civilian casualties; for full, prompt, impartial, independent and effective investigations into alleged serious violations under international law; for the prosecution of alleged serious violations; and for the provision of assistance to victims.

In this sense, we welcome the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 71/248, establishing the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes

under International Law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. The Mechanism is mandated to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses and to prepare files in order to facilitate and expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings in national, regional or international courts or tribunals. It is anticipated that the Mechanism will not share information in circumstances in which a trial may be held in absentia on the basis of universal jurisdiction.

In line with the principle of complementarity, we call on all States to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), to penalize the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole and to enable the ICC to investigate such crimes should national justice systems not be able or willing genuinely to do so. Through such measures, we can deter future crimes by closing the impunity gap.

The report of the Secretary-General in the protection of civilians (S/2017/414) rightly puts an emphasis on prevention. Preventing armed conflict in the first place is the best way to protect civilians. However, prevention also applies within the context of armed conflict. Good practice that spares civilians from harm should be developed, implemented and shared, as identified in the Secretary-General's report. The report underlines the importance of finding comprehensive strategies to address forced displacement. We recall that two thirds of forcibly displaced persons are displaced within their own countries. Ensuring assistance and protection but also the development of opportunities for displaced persons is crucial, especially when looking at the many protracted situations.

A gender perspective is also a key component of effective protection. At the same time, preventing forced displacement in the first place becomes even more important, including by addressing the need to avoid civilian harm during hostilities in an urban environment and to prevent the indiscriminate use of weapons, in particular in areas with concentrations of civilians.

Access remains a central challenge in conflicts around the world. For example, millions of civilians are on the brink of famine in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, and humanitarian access restrictions imposed by parties to conflict played a key role in this crisis.

Greater respect for international humanitarian law and negotiations for the purposes of gaining humanitarian access may imply contacts with all parties to armed conflicts, including armed groups. The Group of Friends takes note of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians currently endorsed by 40 countries, aimed at reinforcing the protection of civilians by troop-contributing countries and police-contributing countries in the framework of peacekeeping operations. The Group of Friends calls on all current and future Security Council members to take timely and decisive action to prevent or end genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The Group of Friends would like to encourage States having not yet done so to consider acceding to the Additional Protocols to the Geneva conventions of 1949, in particular this year, the year of the fortieth anniversary of Additional Protocols I and II, and to engage constructively in the ongoing discussions in Geneva about ways and means to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Romania.

Mr. Jinga (Romania) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Uruguyan presidency of the Security Council for the initiative of having convened this open debate one year after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2017), which focuses on the protection of civilians during armed conflict and the protection of medical and humanitarian staff in areas of conflict. I should like also to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his detailed briefing on the current situation.

Romania fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would now add some remarks in our national capacity.

Improvement of the condition of wounded and injured armed forces personnel was codified by the very first Geneva Convention, in 1864. In the wake of the Second World War, the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols provided the modern framework for international humanitarian law and must remain at the heart of our action in addressing all conflicts.

However, despite this commitment, the situation on the ground reflects a cruel reality: there is a growing lack of security for the injured and ill and for medical

and humanitarian staff, whose work is exclusively medical in nature. No conflict more starkly reflects the horrors of war and its impact on the lives of innocent civilians than the protracted violence in Syria, where more than 13 million people are in need of protection or assistance.

Despite the protected status of medical establishments under international law, such structures continue to be destroyed or damaged in the wake of conflict or combat, even following the 30 December 2016 ceasefire. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), seven attacks against medical facilities were reported in Syria in February and 19 others in March. In addition, the lack of specialized professional medical personnel has a significant impact on the most common medical services, such as vaccination. The repercussions of this war on civilians will continue to reverberate for many years after peace in Syria has been restored.

The conflict in Yemen is equally alarming. Currently fewer than half of medical facilities are functioning. There is a grave scarcity of staff, equipment and medicine. Some 15 million people lack access to basic medical services. Thirteen health-care providers have been killed and 31 wounded since the outbreak of hostilities, according to OCHA.

Reducing or cutting off people's access to basic medical services is a grave violation of international humanitarian law. All parties to conflict are bound by a strict obligation to respect and protect medical staff, facilities and vehicles, as well as the wounded and the sick. Security Council resolution 2286 (2016), which Romania co-sponsored, is an important benchmark in the international community's efforts to draw attention to the protection of medical and humanitarian staff in areas of conflict. However, after outrage, it is time to act. The resolution must mark not the end of a political process but rather the commencement of a practical effort.

Medical infrastructure is also referred to as critical infrastructure. Security Council resolution 2341 (2017), on the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist threats, buttresses this approach, especially in the realm of civilian protection. Intentional and direct attacks against hospitals are war crimes, hence the need to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and brought to justice.

Protection of civilians during armed conflict, including the need to protect health care, which is the topic of today's debate, remains a key aim. Although it is incumbent primarily upon States to protect their people, the protection of civilians is an integral facet of peacekeeping operations, with a significant impact on both the reputation and the credibility of the United Nations. In this regard, Romania aligned itself with the Kigali Principles, which reflects my country's commitment to global efforts to deliver peace and security to conflict-affected countries. Respect for the Kigali Principles is critical and must be reflected in all peacekeeping operation mandates.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Auza (Holy See): My delegation believes that the worst development in the evolution of armed conflict is that civilians not only are less protected and not spared from armed conflicts but have increasingly become targets. The use of civilians as weapons of war represents the most execrable kind of human behaviour. The international community should show itself at its best by holding those who commit such heinous crimes accountable and by rising above narrow national and geopolitical interests to spare innocent civilians from the scourge of war. Unspeakable violence wilfully inflicted upon civilian populations and the flagrant violation of international humanitarian law in many current conflicts are becoming commonplace.

Today's discussion provides a much-needed opportunity to focus on the impact that modern weapons and technology are having on civilians caught up in armed conflict. The technological modernization of weapons blurs the distinction between weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons. So-called modernized conventional weapons increasingly resemble weapons of mass destruction in terms of their indiscriminately targeting civilians and destroying extensive areas, together with their inhabitants. Any weapon with such devastating impacts on civilians is against all international humanitarian law and all ideas of civilization.

The intentional destruction of the infrastructure critical to the survival of the civilian population, such as hospitals and water supplies, has become a strategy of choice in recent and ongoing conflicts in many areas of the Middle East. It is the obligation of

the international community, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, to protect civilians and their critical infrastructure from this brutality and barbarity. A little over a week ago, Pope Francis observed:

> "We say '[War]: Never again,' yet we continue to produce weapons and sell them to those who are at war with one another."

Copious international discussions on ending violence and conflicts are almost pointless if at the same time untold quantities of arms are continuously produced, sold or gifted to dictatorial regimes, terrorist groups or organized-crime syndicates. Arms producers, traders and traffickers must be made aware that they are directly and indirectly abetting mass-atrocity crimes, enabling violators of fundamental human rights, and turning back the development of entire peoples and populations. Strengthening relevant laws and conventions at the multilateral, bilateral and national levels is a necessary step in the right direction in the protection of civilians caught in armed conflicts.

My delegation believes that the Security Council's mission to protect innocent civilians caught in armed conflicts should be considered within the framework of the responsibility to protect. There exists a graver responsibility, first for the States where the crimes were committed, and then for the international community, to defend those who are exposed to war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing. Moreover, the 2005 World Summit Outcome provides that if a State is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action in a timely and decisive manner and in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

In his 2016 report entitled "Mobilizing collective action: the next decade of the responsibility to protect", the Secretary-General affirms,

> "It is time for Member States to show greater resolve in defending and upholding the norms that safeguard humanity, on which the responsibility to protect rests. If we do not, the achievements made in the first decade of the responsibility to protect will be eroded." (*S/2016/620, para. 62*)

Due to the unacceptable human costs of continued inaction, the Holy See appeals once more for the United Nations to define clear and effective criteria for applying the principle of the responsibility to protect and integrating it with Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Sughayar (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Uruguayan delegation for presiding over the Security Council this month and wish it every success as it fulfils that charge. We also thank Uruguay for convening today's open debate, having chosen to make this vital subject a part of the Council's agenda for the month.

My delegation would like to express its appreciation to Secretary-General António Guterres for his invaluable briefing. We also thank the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Deputy Executive Director of Human Rights Watch for their statements. I would like to express Jordan's condolences to the United Kingdom on the terrorist attack that took place in Manchester and led to the death of a number of children and other innocent civilians

The Security Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016) unanimously in response to the violence, attacks and threats against medical personnel in armed conflict. These threats and attacks are not limited to those who were working in the medical and humanitarian fields alone, but they also target the means of transportation being used and medical equipment and facilities. Our meeting today to discuss the steps taken by States to implement resolution 2286 (2016) one year after its adoption is important. I would therefore like to underscore the following.

First, Jordan welcomes the report of the Secretary-General of 10 May 2017 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2017/414), the former Secretary-General's recommendations attached to his letter addressed to the President of the Security Council on 18 August 2016 (S/2016/722, annex), and the latter's briefing to the Council on 28 September 2016 (see S/PV.7779).

Secondly, Jordan attaches great importance to the international humanitarian law and international human rights law and is in full compliance with all their provisions, which is evidenced by the full compliance of our security agencies and the Jordanian personnel in peacekeeping operations with those bodies of law.

Thirdly, we would like to stress that it is important to implement the measures aimed at improving the

protection of medical facilities and personnel as well as measures for prevention, protection and accountability.

In the light of the ongoing crisis in Syria and its political, security and social repercussions that are a still having impact on Syria's neighbours and other countries hosting Syrian refugees, Jordan has demonstrated its respect for international laws in the way it deals with these refugees. Jordan has coordinated with different specialized United Nations agencies to facilitate the entry of humanitarian relief convoys into southern Syria in implementation of resolution 2165 (2014), and this assistance includes non-food items.

Today, the strike by Palestinian prisoners of war is in its thirty-ninth day. These prisoners are continuing their hunger strike as a call on Israeli prison authorities to abandon their policies of isolation and administrative detention. Accordingly, we call on Israel to comply with its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We also note the statement contained in the letter of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations concerning the violation of rights of a Palestinian prisoners of war and the deteriorating humanitarian conditions, namely, that he called for an end to practices that violate prisoners' basic rights.

In conclusion, the responsibility to protect civilians and provide health care in armed conflict reflects a genuine commitment by Member States, especially in the light of diverse threats that we are facing today in terms of the growing terrorism and extremism that are threatening all parts of the world and are violating principles of human rights law and international humanitarian law and all other bodies of international law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Winid (Poland): I would like to thank Uruguay for convening today's important debate. I also offer my special thanks to the briefers for their comprehensive presentations and for their dedication and work in the field.

Poland aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union, but I would like to add some comments in my national capacity.

Violations of international humanitarian and human rights law continue to have an enormous negative impact on civilians in conflict zones in various parts of the world. The response of the international community is crucial to ending this situation. We must all work together to deliver on our pledge to leave no one behind, and while doing so, we should have three separate conflict phases in mind, namely, before, during and after a conflict.

Most civilian deaths and suffering could be avoided if the fundamental norms of international humanitarian and human rights law were respected. So we propose that the following measures be undertaken.

First, in terms of preventive measures, Member States should adhere to international treaties binding parties to upholding international law and protecting civilians in armed conflict, in particular the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols thereto of 1977 and 2005. They should also reinforce their national legislation related to the protection of medical care in armed conflict and introduce guarantees for medical personnel to allow them to act freely.

Secondly, during the conflict cycle, it is of utmost importance to introduce safety measures like mapping the location of medical personnel, medical facilities and the equipment and to secure humanitarian access for civilians to receive life-saving assistance and protection.

Poland was among the sponsors of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of medical personnel in armed conflict. We wish to reiterate what was stated in the seventeenth preliminary paragraph of the resolution: "attacks intentionally directed against buildings, material, medical units and transport and personnel... are war crimes". Perpetrators of these crimes must be held accountable.

We would also like to use today's debate to endorse the recommendation of the Secretary-General and the International Committee of the Red Cross that States and parties to conflict should avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. For instance, as independent non-governmental research showed, shelling in eastern Ukraine has directly damaged hospitals, destroyed ambulances and killed or injured health workers and their patients. It also damaged infrastructure and created travel risks. As a result, the availability and accessibility of health care have drastically declined.

Thirdly, after a conflict, States should introduce accountability measures and sanctions as mechanisms for leveraging compliance from conflict parties to conform with international human rights and humanitarian law. Poland has experience with regard to providing medical assistance to those in need in conflict zones. For instance, in the years 2007-2015 we maintained a field hospital in the Afghan province of Ghazni. Apart from emergency medical care, patients were provided with basic medications. A Polish medical team also delivered medical care among children and youth. In the framework of a Polish assistance programme, we also provided a city hospital in Ghazni with some medical equipment and supplies. In the last two years, Poland assigned funds to rebuild and support hospitals that deliver humanitarian assistance to war victims in Syria.

In conclusion, let me join other delegations and reiterate our strong support for all issues pertaining to the protection of civilians agenda. We very much thank Uruguay for taking up this topic during its presidency in the Security Council.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Mrs. Schwalger (New Zealand): I thank all the briefers and I commend Uruguay for organizing today's debate.

New Zealand aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Spain.

As we have already heard today, millions of civilians living in areas of armed conflict around the world face grave dangers. All too often parties to armed conflict are placing military advantage ahead of international humanitarian law. This fact, combined with the increasing trend for hostilities to take place in urban settings, has devastated civilian populations. In some cases their suffering has been exacerbated through the deliberate obstruction of humanitarian aid and violent attacks on medical facilities.

The use of indiscriminate explosive weapons in populated areas is a distressing illustration of the disrespect for international humanitarian law demonstrated by some parties to armed conflict. Explosive weapons in populated areas have destroyed hospitals, schools, places of worship and vital infrastructure. Millions of civilians have been displaced and those who remain struggle to access essential services, including medical care. The consequences can be catastrophic and will be felt long into the future.

Given these negative trends, we welcome the Secretary-General's leadership on protecting civilians in armed conflict and his path to protection. We are pleased that he is focused on this critical issue. We are convinced that there is more that the United Nations can and should be doing to prevent conflict. We commend the Secretary-General's determination to mobilize the United Nations system towards this goal in a holistic manner. We also welcome his focus on protecting the medical and humanitarian mission and tackling the challenges associated with the mass displacement of civilian populations affected by conflict.

We sit in this Chamber, a year since resolution 2286 (2016) was unanimously adopted by the Security Council, with a historic number of sponsors. As one of the drafters of resolution 2286 (2016), New Zealand was pleased to work with four other Security Council members to develop this response to attacks on health-care workers and facilities. However, since that resolution was adopted, we have continued to witness outrages that shock our collective conscience. Rather than providing care to those wounded in conflict, doctors and nurses continue to be counted among the casualties in significant numbers. Hospitals have been levelled. Central tenets of international humanitarian law are routinely violated with impunity in some parts of the world.

All Member States, not only those who are parties to armed conflict, have a responsibility to take action. Violations of international humanitarian law must continue to be condemned and violators brought to justice. We encourage all Member States to implement the recommendations made by the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2286 (2016) in order to better protect the wounded, medical personnel and medical facilities in armed conflict.

For New Zealand's part, we continue to build a strong understanding of international humanitarian law at all levels within our Defence Force. We are using practical and innovative tools to ensure that all members of the New Zealand Defence Force have ready access to a concise code of conduct, whether they are in an office or in the field on active duty. This includes fundamental provisions of international law pertaining to the protection of civilians and the medical mission.

But we have to take this one step further. Our troops, in New Zealand, are also required to prevent violations, and where they do occur, to report them.

Resolution 2286 (2016) established a reporting architecture which will ensure that the question of attacks on the medical mission will continue to receive regular attention by the Council. The Council should continue to demand compliance with international law and take decisions to do everything possible to protect civilians caught up in armed conflict.

Together with the Secretary-General's path to protection and action on this issue by all Member States, we hope that some relief will be brought to the millions of innocent civilians suffering in armed conflicts around the world. New Zealand pays tribute to the International Committee of the Red Cross, Human Rights Watch, Médecins Sans Frontières and all international humanitarian [NOTE: speaker did not say "humanitarian"] organizations for the work they do in supporting civilians and the medical community they serve. We know it is an uphill battle to sustain active engagement by Member States on this issue, including by those sitting at this table, but it is a job that they must do and we will always support them.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mrs. Gregoire-Van-Haaren (Netherlands): I thank Uruguay for convening this debate on the protection of civilians and health care in armed conflict. We welcome the discussion on this issue, which requires our urgent attention at the highest level.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and with the statement delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians. In addition, I would like to make the following remarks.

In his latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2017/414), the Secretary-General emphasizes three priority areas for improvement, which the Netherlands fully supports. I would like to focus on two of the three protection priorities. The first is protecting the mission of humanitarian and medical personnel and prioritizing the protection of civilians. Despite the Security Council's unanimous adoption last year of its landmark resolution 2286 (2016), we see little change on the ground. We cannot condone attacks on medical personnel and health infrastructure, not just because the safety of medical missions is at the heart of humanitarian action, but also because it will more generally erode respect for international humanitarian law. We cannot allow attacks on health-care services to become an accepted part of warfare. We, as Member States, must put the recommendations of the Secretary-General for the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) into practice. And we should do more. Improved and harmonized data collection will provide a factual base for mechanisms such as the Security Council-mandated Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children in armed conflict.

We are very worried about the direct and indirect effects of the attacks on medical facilities in Yemen and what they mean for the access to health care of Yemeni children, who are currently facing a cholera epidemic on top of severe malnutrition. An environment that ensures the safe and unimpeded delivery of medical care in armed conflict is vitally important. The 20 million people currently at risk of famine desperately need rapid, unimpeded and sustained access to humanitarian aid, which should be accorded in full respect for humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

That brings me to my second point, which is the importance of ensuring that the parties to conflicts strengthen their respect for international law. In Syria, Yemen and other conflict situations, civilians are more than ever becoming the victims of appalling violence. In order to protect them, we urgently need to improve respect for international humanitarian law, and States should use their influence on the parties involved in armed conflicts to protect civilians. States should also engage constructively in the process aimed at strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law led by the International Committee of the Red Cross and Switzerland. Ensuring accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law is vital, and impunity is unacceptable, because it ultimately helps to undermine the rule of law. Where parties to a conflict persist with serious violations, the Council should take decisive action to ensure accountability, including through referral to the International Criminal Court.

There is also a role for other actors. The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the General Assembly's establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation

and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in Syria. We urge all Member States to support the Mechanism financially and politically, since it can play an important role in preventing impunity for international crimes committed in Syria. We also call on troop-contributing countries to endorse the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians in peacekeeping operations.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands would like to emphasize that it has deep respect and appreciation for the work done by humanitarian workers and medical staff in exceedingly difficult and dangerous circumstances. We call on the international community, the Security Council and individual countries to implement the Secretary-General's recommendations in his report on the protection of civilians in conflict. As a partner for peace, justice and development, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to contribute to that agenda, in close collaboration with Italy, other Member States and relevant actors.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to thank the Uruguayan presidency for convening today's important meeting.

We have taken due note of the concept note on the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict (S/2017/365, annex), including on the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016). In that context, we recall the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, which states that the peoples of the United Nations are determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights and human dignity. Today, however, our world remains incapable of translating those noble purposes and principles into a reality where peace, security and prosperity prevail. This has happened because these principles are used by some Governments to legitimize hegemonic policies and interfere in other States' internal affairs.

I would like to make some remarks on behalf of my country, which for seven years has suffered the scourge international terrorism, which is supported by some of the members of the Security Council and other States. It is States that have the primary and exclusive responsibility to protect their civilians. We cannot deal with the issue of the protection of civilians as a whole without ensuring full respect for international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, particularly those affirming the sovereignty and equality of States and the importance of non-interference in a State's internal affairs. We must avoid selectivity and double standards, and we should not exploit the issue of the protection of civilians in order to breach international law and the selfish agendas of certain States. Indeed, some of the ways in which some States have interfered in the affairs of others have had disastrous results for civilians that are very apparent to us all. The protection of civilians in conflict first requires addressing the underlying and genuine causes of those conflicts, and the growing threat posed by terrorism.

Some international parties, however, have shown no willingness to attain that goal but have rather used their economic, political and military might to create new areas of tension around the world, instead of upholding their commitments regarding international peace and security and the eradication of terrorism. It is strange to see them continue to take liberties as they accuse others of violating the rules of international law and international humanitarian law, forgetting their own crimes in many parts of the world . How can the United States, the United Kingdom and France claim to respect international law when, as members of illegitimate coalitions, they are attacking other countries and killing their citizens? They infringe on the sovereignty of other States and destroy their health infrastructure with no respect whatsoever for the Charter of the United Nations and the resolutions of the Security Council. They have thus lost all legitimacy and credibility when it comes to making statements on human rights — statements by their representatives that are nothing but lies.

How can Saudi Arabia be a member of the Human Rights Council when it is sending billions of dollars to help murder Syrians and destroy our health facilities, which is then being turned into warehouses for terrorists? It is spreading cholera in Yemen and attacking funeral processions, hospitals and other infrastructure mercilessly. How can Qatar preside over the Dialogue Among Civilizations initiative when it publicly supports the Al-Nusra Front, a terrorist organization that continues to commit crime after barbaric crime in Syria, including the destruction of clinics and health centres?

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has a constitutional duty to protect its civilians. We are

committed to total respect for our citizens' lives and to providing them with basic services, including health, education and social protection, despite the tremendous challenges that we are dealing with. We will spare no effort in upholding and meeting our commitments under international humanitarian law. We have re-established the Syrian Commission for International Law and organized numerous international activities, including training sessions.

Armed terrorist groups have invaded and occupied all of the hospitals and clinics in all of the areas of Syria where those groups are present. The hospitals have been turned into military bases and weapons depots or have been demolished. Modern infrastructure has also been destroyed. The Al-Kindi Hospital and the Surgical Ophthalmology Hospital in Aleppo were both renowned institutions of the Middle East. We have heard the lies that have been spread and the manipulations of the truth, such as that some armed terrorists have represented themselves as members of humanitarian and health care organizations. The so-called White Helmets are nothing but a cover for individuals committing terrorist acts with impunity, supported by members of the Security Council. Numerous instances have underscored those lies. For example, I can refer to the medical material found in the warehouses of terrorist groups in east Aleppo. Those are the same terrorists that have come to possess medical materials by depriving civilians who are in great need of such resources.

I wish to emphasize the fact that we need to protect civilians, including those civilians who are suffering under the Israeli occupation in the occupied Syrian Golan and the other occupied Arab territories. We must build medical infrastructure for those citizens, owing to the refusal on the part of the occupying Israeli authorities to build a hospital for our citizens living in the occupied Syrian Golan, where they are being cruelly deprived of medical care.

What can we call an occupying Power whose Prime Minister visits injured belonging to Jabhat al-Nusra at Israeli hospitals? Of course, we call it occupying and terrorist Power.

Today, the United Nations is in moral crisis and representatives of States are forced to listen to the lies of the representative of the worst occupying Power known to humankind — the Israeli occupation Power. As I have mentioned, the Israeli authorities refuse the requests of the civilians of the Syrian Golan to build a hospital or allow the sick to receive treatment in the hospitals of their home country, Syria.

Those whom the Israeli representative referred to as receiving treatment in Israeli hospitals are terrorists from Jabhat al-Nusra and other armed terrorist groups. We have informed the Council repeatedly about their treatment in the occupying Power's hospitals. Israel's role in the Syrian crisis is crystal clear; it provides logistic support to the terrorists in the area of separation, as confirmed in the reports of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. When the terrorists, are under increased military pressure, help comes from Israel through air and artillery bombing of the Syrian forces fighting terrorists.

In the case of Liechtenstein, we heard the representative of that country insist on promoting the so-called International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. I call on all Member States to read the delivered by the Syrian Arab Republic to the Secretary-General (A/71/799), which reveals the grave legal violations in its establishment. Here, I cannot but congratulate Liechtenstein's representative on his country's disgraceful participation in its establishment process, alongsidethe state of Qatar, which supports the terror unleashed in Syria by Jabhat al-Nusra, a group that is on the Security Council's list.

Lastly, we emphasize the fact that the protection of civilians, particularly with regard to the issue of health care, requires solutions to the real problems underlying the conflict and addressing the causes of the suffering of the civilians. The problems facing civilians include foreign occupation, terrorism and unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States, the European Union and other States against many peoples, particularly the people of Syria.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Paraguay.

Mr. Arriola Ramírez (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Republic of Paraguay, my delegation pays tribute to the medical and humanitarian personnel, those that have fallen in the conflict zones and their families. May our words serve as an offering for their sacrifice and a support for their selfless work.

We thank the Secretary-General and the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch for their briefings on the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict. And we welcome the initiative on the part of the Uruguayan presidency of the Security Council to convene this open debate on the occasion of the first anniversary of resolution 2286 (2016), which is exclusively dedicated to the protection of medical care in armed conflict.

As to the protection of civilians in general, Paraguay reaffirms that an effective system for the protection of civilians in armed conflict is the responsibility of the Security Council, as has been noted by all Member States, whether they are parties or non-parties to conflict. It is therefore up to the Council to continue to include clearly and explicitly the protection of civilians in the mandates of peacekeeping operations, and as a matter of priority in missions where civilians are at high risk of violence.

My delegation believes that education and training in international humanitarian and human rights law are essential in order to stop and prevent acts of violence, attacks and threats against civilians in armed conflicts. In that regard, I wish to emphasize that the Republic of Paraguay is currently contributing military personnel to six peacekeeping missions. Prior to their deployment, the Paraguayan Peacekeeping-Operations Training Centre, known as Cecopaz-Paraguay, provides specific training in the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in accordance with the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.

With regard to the protection of medical-care services in armed conflict, Paraguay emphasizes the importance of resolution 2286 (2016), which draws attention to the need for information and analysis on the risks to which health-care services are exposed in armed conflict. We also express our commitment to the Secretary-General's initiative on the development and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned in the protection of health-care services in armed conflict and for their subsequent cross-cutting inclusion in the national military policies and practices of Member States and the mandates of peacekeeping missions provided by the Security Council.

Finally and once again, the Republic of Paraguay deplores the contempt shown for the fundamental norms of international humanitarian law and human rights by parties to conflict, in particular the practice of using starvation to wage war against the population, restrictions imposed on humanitarian access and the protection of civilians, and the undermining of the institution of asylum and the principle of non-refoulement.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belarus.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the protection of the medical staff who work to save the lives of others while risking their own lives is of great and particular significance. Belarus attaches great importance to the strengthening of guarantees for the protection of all categories of civilians not directly engaged in hostilities.

Nevertheless, today I wish to draw the attention of the members of the Council to another vulnerable professional group that is present in hot spots, namely, translators and interpreters. Yesterday the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/288, on the role of professional translation in connecting nations and fostering peace, understanding and development. The resolution acknowledges the practical contribution of language professionals to the maintenance of international peace and security and to peacekeeping.

In high-risk settings of armed conflict and in post-conflict peacebuilding, translators and interpreters face grave danger in carrying out their professional duties as they seek to help establish dialogue among the parties to conflict and with civilians. They are subjected to threats. They are abducted and murdered. They are subjected to torture and degrading treatment.

A single database that reflects the genuine scale of losses amongst translators and interpreters working in armed conflict has never been established. Some statistics have been compiled by international translators and interpreters associations from open sources, and they are appalling.

From 2003 to 2008, no fewer than 360 translators and interpreters were killed; 1,200 were wounded while working alongside American troops for its subcontracting organizations in Iraq. According to some reports, the likelihood of the death of translators and interpreters in Iraq is 10 times greater than for regular troops. In 21 days in late 2006, British armed forces in Iraq lost 21 interpreters, 17 of whom were

deliberately killed due to their professional activity. The list of such examples goes on and on.

Indeed, at present there is a fundamental principle in international humanitarian law of a distinction between civilians and individuals directly taking part in armed conflict. Non-compliance with this principle is considered to be a war crime. We would like to clarify that we do not mean to apply the term "civilian" to interpreters that are part of regular troops. Rather, we are referring to those categories of interpreters who do not take up arms and serve solely to establish dialogue among the parties to conflict. Those include interpreters who do not act on behalf of a party to a conflict and interpreters assisting agencies or individuals who do not engage in conflict, including international organizations, media professionals and non-governmental organizations.

However, interpreters and translators are neither regular civilians when they represent a party to conflict, nor are they, in those instances, regular fighters — at least, not so long as they do not directly engage in hostilities. So this is a special category of individual in need of special protection.

We believe that the time is ripe to craft an international instrument — be it an international treaty or a Security Council resolution — a document that would affirm the special status of translators and interpreters under dangerous conditions so as to raise the level of their protection *de lege ferenda* — with a view to a future law. Why not have special signage to distinguish interpreters from civilians or parties to conflict, as was done for medical staff?

There are issues that need to be addressed in these documents, and there are a great number of such issues. We must acknowledge the fact that due attention is not being paid to the issue of the protection of translators and interpreters under dangerous conditions. We must consider how best and most expeditiously to bridge this gap.

If the issue raised today is duly taken into account by delegations both within the Council and beyond, then we will stand ready to work jointly to seek solutions to the issue of the legal protection of translators and interpreters in high-risk settings.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): We congratulate you, Mr. President, and your delegation on the able manner in which you are presiding over the Security Council. We thank you for organizing this open debate on such an important issue.

We also thank the Secretary-General for his statement, and the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Christine Beerli, and Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte for their briefings.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Debates of this nature are necessary, as protecting civilians from the scourge of war is at the core of the Security Council's mandate to maintain international peace and security. If the Council cannot play its role in this regard, it then fails in its responsibilities toward the international community that it seeks to serve. We wish to begin by commending the humanitarian workers and medical staff who carry out their duties so valiantly, often under the most difficult of circumstances. South Africa has been involved in a number of initiatives that highlight the circumstances in which health-care and humanitarian workers operate, including the Health Care in Danger project of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

We wish to underline that, while it remains the primary responsibility of States to protect civilians, including humanitarian personnel and health workers within their borders, all parties, including armed opposition groups, must also bear responsibility for ensuring that civilians and health workers are protected. All parties to a conflict should fully comply with their obligations under international law, as stated in resolution 2286 (2016). Furthermore, we believe that Member States have an obligation under international humanitarian law to allow and facilitate the safe and unhindered passage of humanitarian relief, including medical missions and their personnel and supplies.

My delegation wishes to emphasize the following four points.

First, we support the Secretary-General's call for increased efforts in mediation and preventive diplomacy in our quest to protect civilians. The Security Council should therefore ensure that the protection of civilians remains a core aspect of all political strategies to

prevent and resolve conflicts. In pursuing that goal, we call on the United Nations to strengthen and streamline regional partnerships, including the African Union-United Nations partnership, in fulfilling its mandate to protect civilians and health workers.

Secondly, South Africa supports the adoption and implementation of measures pursuant to resolution 2286 (2016), which emphasizes the protection of the wounded and sick, medical personnel, medical facilities and equipment, and the sharing of best practices and lessons learned. We reiterate that the selective application of the protection of civilians mandate undermines the credibility of the international community in pursuing this goal.

Thirdly, the Security Council should at all times condemn all instances of arbitrary withholding of consent to impartial humanitarian relief operations or any actions to deprive civilians of means indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding access to relief. Such acts constitute violations of international humanitarian law and are therefore unacceptable.

Lastly, we call on all parties to conflicts to comply with their obligations to respect and protect humanitarian and medical personnel and objects, as well as to condemn direct and indiscriminate attacks in this regard. The Council should ensure that activities of this nature are investigated and do not go unpunished. Ensuring accountability for these crimes is crucial in ensuring that the credibility of the United Nations is maintained, which is key to delivering global justice.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Bande (Nigeria): The Nigerian delegation commends the presidency of Uruguay for organizing this important debate on the protection of civilians and medical care in armed, and for the detailed concept note (S/2017/365, annex) to guide our discussion.

We support the Secretary-General's call upon Member States and parties to conflict to develop, implement and share operational policies and practical measures to enhance respect for international humanitarian and human rights law and to avoid harm to civilians. We also commend the briefers for their perspectives.

It is widely acknowledged that the existence of health facilities and activities of health workers are vital to save lives and provide assistance to the wounded and the sick in situations of armed conflict. Health workers and other civilian personnel carry out their duties at great risk to their lives. They have been kidnapped, tortured and killed while performing their life-saving duties.

Today's debate is taking place at a time of great crisis in some parts of the world, a time when attacks on humanitarian workers have hindered the delivery of much-needed medical assistance and supplies to millions of people in many theatres of conflict. Undoubtedly, the United Nations has a pivotal role to play in the protection of civilians in armed conflict and in preventing the emergence of situations of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Nigeria believes that the critical element in preventing violations of international humanitarian law in armed conflict is the respect for international human rights and humanitarian law.

The fact that attacks are being carried out against medical personnel and humanitarian workers exclusively engaged in medical duties and their means of transport and equipment demonstrates the level of vulnerability to which they are exposed. The existence of such threats is due not to a lack of international mechanisms, but rather to the lack of political will to implement existing norms.

We recall in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which established the standards of international law for humanitarian treatment in conflict situations. It provides not only for the protection of the wounded and sick and of medical and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, but also places obligations on parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances.

My delegation therefore sees today's debate as a significant step towards realizing that commitment. That is an urgent and priority task that the Council must deal with in the face of several conflict situations across the globe. We acknowledge the work already done in that regard and recall the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) — the first of its kind, dedicated to the protection of medical care in armed conflict. We must continue to work in concert to build upon that laudable initiative.

As a first step, there must be unanimity in strongly condemning acts of violence, attacks and threats against the wounded and the sick and medical and humanitarian personnel, as well as hospitals and other

medical facilities, wherever such acts occur. Failure to do so will result in long-term consequences for the civilian population in conflict situations and for the health-care systems of the countries concerned. Concrete steps must be taken to ensure that health-care workers and facilities are protected. All parties to armed conflicts must fully comply with their obligations under international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, particularly their obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

In the fulfilment of its obligations, the Nigerian Government has set up the Presidential Committee on the North East Initiative to serve as the primary national body to, inter alia, see to the enhancement of the security conditions in the north-eastern part of the country, facilitate the work of health personnel and ease the movement of medical equipment and supplies. We recognize and commend the assistance received from international partners and humanitarian agencies in the setting up of permanent and mobile clinics, as well as support for infrastructure rehabilitation in affected communities.

Nigeria stands ready, as called for in resolution 2286 (2016), to join efforts with all those concerned to protect civilians in armed conflict, especially the prevention of acts of violence, attacks and threats against medical and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties and their means of transport and equipment.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): We thank Uruguay for organizing the first open debate on the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), the first on this subject, nearly a year ago. We also thank the Secretary-General and the briefers for their insightful remarks.

Turkey joins the concerns expressed by many delegations with regard to the ongoing pattern of destruction of medical care in too many conflicts today. Those trends pose an immediate danger to the millions of people affected by man-made crises, as well as the health systems supporting their well-being and lives. With that understanding, Turkey co-sponsored resolution 2286 (2016), which demonstrated the determination of Member States to strengthen the protection of medical care in armed conflict.

In view of the continuing disrespect of international humanitarian law, including through the actions of criminal and terrorist networks in our neighbourhood, Turkey appreciates the Security Council's sustained attention to this issue, with a view to reinforcing the normative framework. Furthermore, we take note of the recommendations presented by the Secretary-General.

Beyond the Security Council, the World Humanitarian Summit, the first anniversary of which we just marked, generated over 3,000 commitments by Member States and other stakeholders. Some of those commitments highlighted actions to strengthen the protection of civilians, including women and children, and the promotion of the centrality of protection. Other commitments demonstrated a collective desire to address the root causes of conflict, increase conflict prevention and resolution capacities and learn from successful prevention practices. Those commitments can make a meaningful change in the lives of 130 million affected people only if they are implemented. As President Erdogan underscored in his message to mark the anniversary of the Istanbul Summit, it is important to maintain the momentum generated by the World Humanitarian Summit, and we call on all stakeholders to uphold their commitments.

Turkey has been carrying out activities to reinforce the respect for the protection of the wounded and sick, to ensure access to assistance, to raise awareness with regard to the protection of health care and to support efforts to increase accountability. In Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, Turkish assistance has strived to strengthen the national health systems. In Yemen, we have been providing medical assistance in Turkish hospitals for those affected by the ongoing conflict. In Libya, just yesterday Turkish aid agencies delivered to the Libyan Government of National Accord, more than 22 tons of medication and health kits so as to support the various hospitals and medical facilities.

However, more than anywhere else, Turkey's humanitarian and medical efforts have been focused on Syria. Since the beginning of the crisis, Turkey has maintained an open-door policy, including for urgent medical evacuations. Today, Turkey provides free health care to the more than 3 million Syrians in Turkey. We have been facilitating the work of the United Nations agencies in their vaccination campaigns for Syrian children and that of medical non-governmental organizations across the border who treat civilians targeted by barrel bombs, shelling and chemical

weapons. Inside Syria, Turkey has been supporting the Security Council-mandated cross-border shipments that have delivered more than 11,500 truckloads of humanitarian assistance since July 2014. Those efforts helped the United Nations and its partners to reach more than 13.5 million Syrians with health assistance.

In blatant disregard of international humanitarian law, the attacks on medical staff and their equipment and facilities have been more brutal in Syria than anywhere else. Most of those attacks were perpetrated by the Syrian regime. Furthermore, the regime continues to pursue its shameful policy of removing medical equipment and medication from humanitarian convoys.

If we are to transform the recent advances achieved in the normative framework under today's agenda into concrete action on the ground, the implementation of our existing obligations and commitments must take place in Syria and in other ongoing conflicts. Turkey stands ready to support the relevant United Nations-led efforts in achieving that objective.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Skinner-Klée (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We congratulate you, Madam President, and your delegation on organizing this debate on the protection of civilians, and we commend the fact that your Minister for Foreign Affairs has been presiding it. We also express our appreciation to the briefers for their contributions.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We note with concern that in armed conflicts, combatants and civilians are dying from wounds that would not have been fatal had they had access to medical assistance, which they have the right to receive. To address that, the Security Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016), which reaffirmed the responsibility of parties involved in armed conflicts to comply fully with the obligations under international humanitarian law so as to ensure the unqualified respect and protection of all humanitarian personnel exclusively involved in medical missions, their means of transport and equipment, hospitals and other health-care facilities.

However, we find it disturbing that violent acts against such personnel and facilities continue to be practiced by parties in conflict, especially terrorist groups who carry out indiscriminate attacks against hospitals, humanitarian convoys and infrastructure used for medical care. Attacks against water supplies as a tool of war are equally reprehensible, flying in the face of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It is unacceptable that armed conflicts are on the rise in urban areas, in which populations are at their densest, thereby causing increased fatalities by the indiscriminate use of artillery and aerial bombardment, as well as by the use of improvised explosive devices that considerably increase the lethal radius.

We also condemn the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which continue to kill and injure many people and often block humanitarian aid operations. We therefore echo the call of the Secretary-General to redouble our efforts to comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We urge States to ratify the main international instruments pertaining to weapons and ammunition, such as the Arms Trade Treaty.

We underscore the importance of preventing the displacement of people and of protecting humanitarian and medical missions, as well as the civilian population. We believe that it is important to ensure that all international instruments and tools at the disposal of the Security Council are put to use in combating crimes in the fields we are discussing, and that they contain tangible elements in the areas of deterrence, accountability and justice. My delegation maintains that the protection of civilians is a legal obligation. We must, therefore, demand that members of security forces, local militias or other armed groups who have committed violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law be held to account.

We reaffirm that it is the primary responsibility of troop- and police-contributing countries to investigate, without delay, allegations of acts of violence against civilians. In that regard, we underscore the importance of the International Criminal Court. We advocate that States ensure that their armed and security forces, in accordance with their mandates, work to adopt practical measures to protect the wounded and the sick, as well as medical services, when planning and implementing their operations. In that regard, we welcome the recommendations of the Secretary-General to ensure that the States Members of the United Nations and the parties to conflict develop, implement and share operational policies and measured practices so as to

improve respect for international law, with a view to preventing harm to civilian populations.

Guatemala commends the fact that the report of the Secretary-General advocates early warning and action and stresses the close link between sustainable peace and prevention. That concept is a game-changer in meeting the challenges of peace and security, development and human rights.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen: (Bangladesh) We thank the Uruguayan presidency for organizing today's open debate to coincide with the first anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016). We also thank the Secretary-General for his informative report (S/2017/414) and for his succinct recommendations under his three priority areas relating to the protection of civilians.

We agree with his views regarding the inevitability of civilian casualties in wars and armed conflicts. As one of the leading troop-contributing countries, Bangladesh takes a pragmatic approach to the protection-of-civilians mandate in both practice and preparedness, while adhering to the principles of peacekeeping operations. Being part of most of the highly challenging United Nations peacekeeping missions, we have seen the relevance of the protection-of-civilians mandate at first hand on the ground, and we have usually tackled it with professionalism and some degree of creativity, even when the mandate was not laid out in clear, specific terms. Our endorsement of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians was largely guided by such considerations. As announced by our Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, at the peacekeeping summit in New York, we remain committed to further mainstreaming the protection of civilians in peacekeeping training programmes, designed for our troops and police.

In line with our previous statements in the Security Council, we take this opportunity to further elaborate on five points. First, there needs to be greater emphasis on the strategic assessment of threats to civilians, so that the Security Council can clearly set out its expectations regarding the implementation of peacekeeping mandates to protect civilians. To that effect, it is imperative to have meaningful coordination and consultation among the Security Council, troop- and police-contributing countries, the Secretariat, and United Nations country teams, with a view to improving guidance to the missions and promoting a mission-wide coherent approach to protecting civilians.

Secondly, in order to be effective, the protection-of-civilians mandates require the continued political support of the Security Council, the main parties to the conflict and the commitment of the host Governments in particular. Protection-of-civilians mandates need to be backed by viable strategies and adequate resources, so that they do not fall through when faced with belligerence from the parties to the conflict or the lack of will or capacity of the host Governments to cooperate. There is need for appropriate investment in building missions' capacities for, inter alia, situational awareness, strategic planning, threat assessment and mitigation. There may be scope for peacekeeping missions to contribute to the capacity-building of national authorities and other local actors in protecting civilians. Such scenarios need to be carefully mapped out and walked through in the course of mandate design and implementation.

Thirdly, measures to ensure the safe passage of the relevant humanitarian personnel and supplies to civilians in need and the addressing of acts of violence, attacks and threats against medical care in armed conflict are critical for the protection of civilians. We subscribe to the notion that respect for medical care in armed conflict needs to be promoted during times of both peace and conflict. There is a need for sustained engagement with the parties to armed conflict so as to ensure that preventive measures can minimize harm to civilians and that medical care is included in the planning and conduct of hostilities. In the case of specific incidents reported and backed by evidence, investigation and accountability must be pursued as the most effective deterrence measure.

Fourthly, the ongoing efforts to end violence against women and children in armed conflict must enlist the support of all State and non-State actors. The underlying causes of forced displacements during armed conflict need to be addressed through inclusive multidimensional and comprehensive approaches. Medical facilities, educational institutions, specialist schools and places of worship should be kept out of harm's way in the planning and conduct of hostilities. The use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects needs to be avoided in populated areas, considering their humanitarian impact. In certain contexts, peacekeepers and humanitarian workers can operate in tandem to

gather information, raise awareness and respond to the needs of those affected.

Lastly, ensuring accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law is a crucial element for enhancing compliance with that law, spreading the message of zero-tolerance and generally strengthening the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict. The Security Council should continue to use the tools at its disposal to that effect, including by providing consistent support to the International Criminal Court so as to enable it to deliver on its mandate.

The security and protection of civilians in today's asymmetric conflict environment are increasingly seen as linked to the legitimacy and credibility of United Nations peacekeeping operations and humanitarian assistance. The protection of civilians through military means alone will always fall short unless vigorously supported by meaningful political processes to prevent conflicts and sustain peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to congratulate you, Madam, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to thank you for convening today's debate. We commend the Foreign Minister of Uruguay, who also presided over the meeting. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General.

Resolution 2286 (2016) is of particular importance, given the outbreak of wars and conflict in many parts of the world, including in our region. Unfortunately, those conflicts have often disregarded the inviolability of medical professionals and their work, the wounded and the sick. We commend the efforts undertaken to assist medical personnel, the wounded and humanitarian workers. They carry out their duties as medical professionals in hospitals and medical centres and provide equipment. The perpetrators of violations must be held accountable. That is the best way to strengthen protection under international humanitarian law.

We can tolerate no delay in the effective implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), because targeting health-care staff and facilities represents a violation of international humanitarian law that has grave repercussions on the ground. The cost is always paid by innocent civilians. In that regard, I would like to note what we have seen every day, which has been documented in reports of the United Nations, namely, the demolition and destruction of hospitals and health-care facilities in Syria by the Syrian Armed Forces, as well other acts of violence, attacks and threats against medical and humanitarian actors. The Syrian Armed Forces have also targeted convoys carrying medical equipment, which has led to the destruction of hospitals and the deaths of many doctors and humanitarian actors, as well as the sick and wounded. Such actions certainly constitute a grave breach of international humanitarian law. Many Syrian health-care facilities are unable to function now, which constitutes a grave threat to thousands of civilians. It is therefore necessary for the international community to act and adopt preventive, practical measures in order to end such violations. They constitute flagrant violations of international humanitarian law.

We also need to adopt measures to ensure accountability for the perpetrators of such crimes, who must be brought to justice. They must not enjoy impunity. We believe in the importance of the rule of law, both internationally and domestically, as well as of ensuring accountability in cases of mass atrocities and violations of human rights. That is all necessary in order to reinforce peace and ensure stability on the ground in countries riddled with conflict.

We worked with our partners to ensure that the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/248, establishing the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. That resolution is of great importance for setting up and implementing resolution 2286 (2016) in Syria.

The State of Qatar is committed to providing humanitarian assistance. Much of that assistance is geared towards the alleviation of the suffering of civilians, who are those most affected by armed conflicts. In that regard, we support the provision of medical and health-care support. For example, we provided $1.6 billion for the alleviation of suffering both in Syria and outside of Syria through international humanitarian organizations and donor conferences. Furthermore, a significant portion of that assistance to the region, which has been ravaged by conflict, includes assistance for the health-care sphere. I would also like

to mention international humanitarian organizations operating in Qatar, which are working hard to remedy the situation on the ground. If the international community hopes to succeed in protecting civilians during armed conflicts, it is necessary to work hand-in-hand to find just solutions to the conflicts. My country stands ready to work tirelessly to support any Security Council initiatives to establish international peace and security in the region and in the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Australia welcomes the Secretary-General's focus on prevention. It is undoubtedly the best long-term strategy for protecting civilians. However, where such efforts fail, the protection of civilians must remain our highest priority. The reason is obvious. Already in 2017, we have witnessed frequent, direct, as well as indiscriminate, attacks against civilians. We have witnessed the arbitrary denial of consent to humanitarian access. We have witnessed utter contempt for human rights. We have witnessed such behaviour in conflicts around the world, including in South Sudan and Yemen, but most especially in Syria.

In line with what others have said today, Australia is particularly alarmed by the frequency, severity and deliberate nature of attacks against health care. Today's briefers, like those who have presented before them, have painted a heartbreaking picture of realities on the ground and have provided dire warnings about the risks of failing to implement resolution 2286 (2016) in full. For that reason, we commit to doing our part to translate resolution 2286 (2016) from rhetoric into action.

We applaud the Secretary-General's statement that he will facilitate a global effort to mobilize Member States, civil society and other stakeholders in order to enhance respect for international humanitarian law. We are in full agreement that that must, as a priority, include responding to serious violations, including by holding perpetrators to account.

For good reason, the scorecard of the United Nations on the protection of civilians is one of the litmus tests of the Organization's effectiveness and, frankly, its credibility. Australia therefore expects the members of this Council to support timely and decisive action aimed at preventing or ending the commission of mass atrocities, consistent with the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group's Code of Conduct, as well as with the French and Mexican initiative on veto restraint.

United Nations peacekeeping operations that have been given a protection mandate must prioritize implementation. Despite the significant growth of the protection-of-civilians doctrine and guidance, performance across peacekeeping operations remains mixed. The High-Level Panel on Peace Operations emphasised that protection mandates must be a mission-wide task that utilizes every tool at a given mission's disposal, including non-traditional strategies, such as unarmed civilian protection. The Independent Special Investigation into South Sudan stressed the importance of a forward-leaning, highly mobile posture, including conducting robust, dismounted, day-and-night patrolling. All peacekeepers must be empowered and supported by both the United Nations and the troop- and police-contributing countries to act in accordance with their protection responsibilities.

To assist in such efforts, Australia has provided support to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to disseminate guidelines and policies on the protection of civilians. We have also endorsed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which we consider provide useful guidance to peacekeepers.

In closing, let me pay tribute to those in the field trying to provide protection to civilians, often at great risk to themselves. Together with those whom they are trying to protect, those brave men and women deserve, at the very least, our respect and protection.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia.

Mr. Mnatsakanyan (Armenia) I thank the Uruguayan presidency for its choice of the theme of this open debate, as well as for the concept paper (S/2017/365, annex). We also thank the Secretary-General and the briefers for their analyses.

The latest report of the Secretary General (S/2017/414) of 10 May is alarming. The overall number of people globally displaced reached 65 million in 2016. Civilians are routinely killed. The number of children directly affected by conflicts has been rising. Attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel remain widespread. Recently, more medical personnel have been killed or injured. More journalists have been attacked and killed. Equally disturbing are the observations about the growing fatigue in addressing the suffering

of civilians in conflicts, as well as perceptions of the inevitability of civilian losses in armed conflicts. Such disturbing realities should serve, first of all, as a call for renewed determination to take decisive action.

We support the in-depth analyses and recommendations of the Secretary-General, as contained in his report, for specific measures along the three priority pillars of protection. Furthermore, full compliance with obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, is critical for the protection of civilians and of humanitarian and medical personnel. However, universal ratification of the Additional Protocols has not been achieved. Unimpeded humanitarian and medical access must be fully secured, while the arbitrary withholding of consent to impartial humanitarian and medical assistance must be confronted vigorously. The principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence in humanitarian action must be fully respected.

The Security Council plays a key role in addressing crisis situations and the protection of civilians. We attach equal importance to a comprehensive and consolidated approach of the entire United Nations system in addressing the challenges of protection. Our global agenda for development and the promotion and protection of human rights bear direct relevance to effective measures aimed at averting conflicts in the first place. We recognize the value of such a comprehensive approach as outlined, for example, in One Humanity: Shared Responsibility, the Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit (A/70/709).

We attach considerable importance to actions at the regional level. The division of labour, coordination and non-duplication of efforts and activities are the building blocks of an effective utilization of the capacities of regional organizations in conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

Armenia has been a consistent advocate of and a contributor to the current strong and credible prevention architecture. We are convinced that in order to be effective and serious about our determination to protect, the primary role should be assigned to early action on warning signs of deteriorating situations that could potentially result in conflicts, atrocities and human suffering. Crises, atrocities and genocides do not occur overnight, they are detectable and predictable. Early warning, early action, prevention and conflict resolution should take precedence over crisis management.

The Safe Schools Declaration, initiated by Argentina and Norway, aims at the protection of educational facilities from attacks and military use. Armenia has recently endorsed the Declaration, thus becoming the sixtieth country to assume the political commitment to advance those principles.

The civilian population of Nagorno Karabakh and the bordering regions of Armenia have been consistently exposed to serious humanitarian risks. The aggression against Nagorno Karabakh in April 2016 was accompanied by grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including barbaric acts commensurate with war crimes and crimes against humanity. That aggression inflicted losses on the civilian population, including children and the elderly. Ceasefire violations continue to date. The latest statement of 18 May of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-Chairs was explicit in identifying the party that initiated the violations. The risks of the escalation of the conflict must urgently be averted. Armenia urges an immediate implementation of the agreements reached at the Vienna meeting on Nagorno Karabakh and the trilateral summit on Nagorno Karabakh, held in St. Petersburg in May and June 2016 respectively, in order to create conditions conducive to the advancement of the peace process.

In conclusion, Armenia, once again, expresses its deep appreciation to the international community, to the Council and to Secretary-General Guterres for their continued and unwavering support for the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group co-Chairs, the only internationally agreed format for negotiations for the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, in the hope that a lasting settlement can be reached as soon as possible.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): *At the outset I would like to commend Uruguay for its assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of May and to wish you, Mr. President, every success in conducting the Council's work. I also thank you for preparing the concept note (S/2017/365, annex)*

on today's open debate on resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict, one year after the adoption of that resolution.

I would like to seize this opportunity to thank Secretary-General Guterres and the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch for their briefings this morning.

The appalling figures on the civilians victims of wars and conflicts clearly demonstrate the plight of our world today. The report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts (S/2017/414) refers to huge numbers of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. More than 65 million persons have been displaced because of conflicts, violence or persecution. This meeting provides a good opportunity to review the appalling incidents that occurred in the world last year and to assess the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on the ground.

We have seen the various conflicts in the world at large, especially in the Middle East and Africa, including militias and terrorist groups, which have targeted residential areas, key infrastructure facilities and places that provide basic services. Those actions have become tactics of war so that one party can achieve victory over the other. It has indeed been proven that there have been wide-ranging violations of and disregard for international law in the various conflicts. In Iraq, we have seen such violations by Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, which have included attacks against civilians and the basic civilian infrastructure, the use of human shields, sexual violence and others. In Palestine, the Israeli occupying forces continue their violations against the Palestinian people and their violence and provocations against them, especially in the form of the settlements. We call upon all parties to address those continuous violations. We remind members that the Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), which stresses that all Israeli settlement activities are illegal and must immediately be removed.

In Syria, despite the many humanitarian efforts made to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and the efforts of the State of Kuwait in hosting three international donor conferences and presiding over two conferences on Syria, those efforts were not enough. We welcome further efforts to maintain the ceasefire, establish de-escalation lines and continue negotiations in Geneva. We support the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2254 (2015), to maintain the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

In Yemen, we would like to commend the coalition for restoring legitimacy in Yemen and the efforts aimed at reconstruction in various parts of the country. We support all efforts that would preserve the territorial integrity of Yemen. That can only be achieved through a political solution in accordance with the three major instruments agreed in Kuwait. We have made many efforts to reach a peaceful settlement to the crisis in Yemen. We have hosted three months of consultations among the various Yemeni parties. However, it has been to no avail. Still, we are willing to host our brotherly people in Yemen, once again, at a meeting to sign a final accord.

As I have stated, there have still been gross violations of Security Council resolution 2286 (2016), even after its adoption. We have to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We have to provide the necessary protection to all humanitarian and medical missions and give priority to the protection of civilians in all peacekeeping operations. We have to work on preventing forced displacements and find a durable solution to the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons everywhere in the world.

In conclusion, we would like to stress our support for the vision and recommendations of the Secretary-General contained in his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. He referred to the need to make a leap forward in diplomatic efforts to address this issue and prevent conflict, enhance early-warning systems and encourage the collective efforts to reform the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Mendoza-García (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to express our condolences to the delegation of the United Kingdom for the terrible events that took place this week.

We are grateful for the organization of this open debate and for the two documents presented this morning.

One year ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016), which reminds the parties to armed conflict of their obligations to protect the civilian population and all health and humanitarian personnel

dedicated exclusively to medical missions, their means of transport and equipment, hospitals and other health facilities. Those obligations emanate directly from international law, international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the various resolutions of the Council.

However, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/414) and the briefing we received this morning from Mr. Stagno Ugarte clearly reflect a bleak reality, namely, the horrors suffered by millions of people as a result of armed conflicts, as well as their trials and tribulations as they attempt to escape war and confront the indifference and cruelty with which human life and dignity are treated.

All parties to armed conflict have the international obligation to respect the norms of international humanitarian law, namely to ensure that the wounded and sick receive, in accordance with basic ethical principles, the medical care that they need to safeguard their lives, and also that the personnel carrying out medical missions receive protection. Barriers posed to the provision of humanitarian and medical assistance to the civilian population represent a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, and deliberate attacks on health personnel, medical facilities and places where the injured and the sick are held are war crimes under international law. They also have an immediate impact on the civilian population and the availability of basic health-care services in areas of conflict, exacerbating their also appalling living conditions. It is unacceptable that the parties to an armed conflict should interrupt the supply of drinking water, electricity, gas, food, medication or humanitarian assistance to the civilian population. They must stop using civilian populations as cannon fodder to achieve their political and military aims. The parties must stop locating military targets in medical facilities, move away from major urban centres and refrain from using explosive weapons in cities and other populated areas.

Costa Rica supports the recommendations of the Secretary- General and the appeals made by International Committee of the Red Cross to avoid the use of explosives within or close to densely populated areas and or explosive weapons with wide-ranging effects. We reiterate our support for international efforts aimed at putting an end to explosive weapons in densely populated areas. This is an essential obligation for us.

The international community must assist displaced persons and civilian victims. However, we also have to put an end to the prevailing generalized impunity. In this spirit, it is vital, in Syria in particular, to support the efforts of the General Assembly in the establishment of an independent and impartial international mechanism to assist in the investigation and bring to justice those responsible for the most serious crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. It is vital also that the Council refer to the International Criminal Court the most urgent cases in order for the relevant investigations to be completed and the perpetrators of the most serious crimes to be brought to justice. The Organization must also provide the Court with the economic resources necessary to fully discharge its mandate.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the best way to protect the civilian population and health workers in the long run is prevention and institutional strengthening. It is key to strengthen the rule of law and institutions. We all need to help States ensure that the rule of law prevails in the framework of respect for human rights and the norms of international law.

Finally, we agree with the presidency that as long as the international arms trade continues to fuel conflicts and the air forces of the States involved continue to be supplied with weapons and planes through this trade we will continue not to be able to properly protect civilian populations. The terrible consequences of war will continue to ravage the civilian population until their root causes are dealt with.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cyprus.

Mr. Korneliou (Cyprus): At the outset, allow me to commend you, Mr. President, for having organized this open debate.

Cyprus subscribes to the statement delivered by the European Union and would like to add the following in its national capacity.

The Charter of the United Nations puts the people at the vanguard of the Organization's purpose and vision. A peaceful and safe world is the principal yardstick of our collective failure or success. Civilians are the primary victims in most of today's armed conflicts. They are being indiscriminately killed or injured and often deliberately targeted. The data indicate that more

than 90 per cent of those killed or injured in populated areas are civilians.

Beyond human loss, the consequences extend to the separation of families, the destruction of communities and of cultural heritage, deprivation of education and health care, displacement and alienation of peoples from their ancestral lands and the continuous migratory outpouring in search of shelter and a safe future. It is extremely alarming that more than 2,500 targeted attacks have been carried out in the last four years against patients and health-care workers.

Echoing the need for urgent action, Cyprus co-sponsored resolution 2286 (2016), by which the Security Council strongly condemned attacks on medical personnel in conflict situations today. It deplored the long-term consequences of such attacks for the civilian populations and health-care systems of the countries concerned and demanded an end to impunity for those responsible and respect for international law on the part of all warring parties.

The protection of civilians must be at the core of the Security Council's agenda, not only in connection with peacekeeping missions explicitly mandated to protect civilians, but as an integral part of a comprehensive approach encompassing all aspects related to prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding and the promotion of international peace and security. Cyprus endorses the concept of encompassing the whole spectrum of peacebuilding activities, from contributing to a return to normal conditions and thus providing secure environments, to monitoring human rights and facilitating the implementation of peace agreements.

The protection of civilians in conflict should not be seen merely as a duty deriving from explicit peacekeeping mandates but as a mission-wide task extending to the whole spectrum of peacekeeping operations in a specific context.

Let me give one example from a peacekeeping mission. The United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) — hosted in my country for the past 53 years — is not explicitly mandated to protect civilians but is performing important tasks in this field. According to an agreement reached between Greeks and Turkish Cypriots in 1975, the Turkish side undertook to give the enclaved Greek Cypriot population every form of help to enable them to live a normal life, including facilities for education and for the practice of their religion, as well as medical care by their own doctors and freedom of movement in the north.

In practice, the Cypriot enclaved were subjected to constant harassment. Their living conditions since 1974 and despite the aforementioned agreement can be demonstrated by a simple recount of their numbers. In July 1974, after more than 100,000 Cypriots were forced to flee their homes, a significant number amounting to 20,000 have remained enclaved in the occupied part. In 43 years, this number has diminished to only 403.

Even though due to the help of UNFICYP the Turkish side allowed certain minor improvements in the lives of the enclaved, their living conditions remain deplorable and unchanged. This conclusion is fully in accord with the findings of the European Commission of Human Rights and of the European Court of Human Rights, which examined the plight of enclaved as part of the fourth inter-State application of Cyprus against Turkey.

The report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446), released in 2015, observed a growing gap between what is expected of peace operations and what they deliver, particularly recognizing this gap in the area of the protection of civilians. This shortcoming is to a large extent a result of the gap in many missions between resources and mandates, yet another pertinent issue in the light of ongoing discussions on the financing of peacekeeping operations.

In concluding, let me underline that strengthening the ability of the United Nations to respond to people undergoing hardship remains our fundamental challenge.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Yaakob (Malaysia): At the outset, I would like to express our delegation's profound indignation at the senseless attack in Manchester which killed at least 22 innocent people, including an 8-year-old child. We also condemn strongly the recent attacks that caused casualties in Jakarta and Marawi. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims, the families and the people of the United Kingdom, Indonesia and the Philippines during these trying times.

We join other speakers in expressing our appreciation to the Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human

Rights Watch for their respective briefings. Their invaluable insights on the unpredictable risks faced by medical personnel and the protection of civilians in armed conflict are indeed helpful.

We continue to read frequent media reports of callous and egregious attacks on health-care personnel and facilities. However, we remain hopeful that resolution 2286 (2016), adopted last May, will act as a deterrent against such violent acts. These attacks, deliberate or otherwise, against the wounded and sick, medical personnel and health-care facilities across many conflicts, reflect the current grim realities and a total disrespect for international humanitarian law. It would not be far-fetched to say that these attacks are being used as a tactic of war.

This trend, which we are seeing in various conflicts seemingly without end or without limit, is worthy of a greater and more appropriate response, including concrete actions that must goes further than mere condemnation of such egregious acts. We therefore reiterate our call on the Council to carry out its obligation to enhance its efforts to prevent these acts of violence, including by implementing the Secretary-General's recommendation for a full, prompt, impartial, independent and effective investigation into any attack against a health-care system. My delegation is also of the view that those with influence over conflicting parties should use all available tools at their disposal, through either diplomatic, political or economic means, to leverage enhancement of the protection of medical personnel.

We are not oblivious to the fact that most warring parties continue to blatantly disregard international humanitarian law, nor do they have respect for medical neutrality. Given the bleak outlook for civilians, and particularly children, as a result of systematic targeting of medical facilities in conflict situations, accountability is a key question that requires the urgent attention of all stakeholders, particularly from the Council and the international community. In addition, the establishment of international fact-finding missions, inter alia, should be carried out in line with the Geneva Conventions to investigate allegations of serious violations, bring the perpetrators to justice, enhance accountability and address impunity.

We would like to pay our tribute to fallen medical personnel who have lost their lives in the protection of others. Our utmost gratitude also goes to all parties on the ground, particularly peacekeepers and health-care personnel stationed in conflict zones. As we seek to shield the very persons protecting civilians at large, protection of medical personnel and health facilities should always remain high on the Council's agenda. The Security Council must take timely actions in defending and protecting all human lives in situations of armed conflict, an undertaking that Malaysia is fully committed to pursuing.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I congratulate Uruguay on its presidency of the Security Council this month and reiterate the importance of the topic under discussion today.

The United Arab Emirates is deeply committed to the protection of civilians and medical care in conflict situations, which is why health-care provision around the world, particularly for women and children, is a critical element of our foreign aid and why we co-sponsored resolution 2286 (2016). We are naturally very concerned about the challenges we face in our region, which have severe implications for health care in communities in need.

In Syria, the United Arab Emirates condemns the targeting of medical care in the conflict. We call for the unobstructed delivery of humanitarian aid, including health care, to all Syrians, as well as accountability for crimes committed by the Syrian regime with the help of Iran.

In Yemen, the United Arab Emirates continues to condemn the use of hospitals by Iran-backed Houthi rebels and militias to hide military supplies. Ensuring humanitarian access to civilian populations in Yemen must be the priority for all parties, and the Houthis must stop this practice immediately.

Medical care is also at risk in other conflicts in our region, including Afghanistan and Somalia. The targeting of medical personnel and facilities by terrorist groups not only threatens the welfare of civilians but also the long-term stability of these countries. My country's ambassador to Afghanistan recently paid the ultimate sacrifice, losing his life while he was on a humanitarian mission in Kandahar, and we honour his service to his country.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories also demonstrates the devastating impact of obstructing access to health care. We call on Israel to end its blockade of Gaza, which has exacerbated the damage to health-care infrastructure caused by successive attacks, thereby imperilling the well-being of Palestinians.

The crucial component of resolution 2286 (2016) was its confirmation of the pillars of international humanitarian law. The United Arab Emirates reaffirms its respect for, commitment to and compliance with its obligations under the rules and principles of international law and international humanitarian law. The United Arab Emirates also recalls paragraph nine of resolution 2286 (2016), which strongly urges Member States to investigate and ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law.

However, it is not just the legal frameworks that must underpin health-care delivery. The United Arab Emirates emphasizes the importance of gender-responsive medical care in armed conflict to ensure that women and men have equal access to health services. To that end, the United Arab Emirates urges Member States, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to commit to including women in the design and delivery of health care and humanitarian relief.

Because we believe special consideration must be given to refugee women and children, the United Arab Emirates established the Mrajeeb Al Fhood refugee camp in Jordan, which is exclusively for Syrian families and women arriving alone, offering them the full range of medical and psychosocial services.

The United Arab Emirates recognizes that States must safeguard medical services in armed conflict. That is why, as a member of the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen, my country is committed to working with health-care and aid agencies operating in the country to safely address the needs of the civilian population.

The United Arab Emirates welcomed recommendation 13 of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/722, annex) submitted pursuant resolution 2286 (2016). My country's relief efforts in Yemen have focused on restoring and improving medical facilities and infrastructure, and, to date, the United Arab Emirates has built or reconstructed 40 hospitals and clinics in that country, equipping them with new operating rooms, supplies, medicines and emergency vehicles. We have also received 1,500 Yemenis in the United Arab Emirates for medical treatment, as have other coalition members — this in addition to my country's delivery of basic supplies and facilities necessary to ensure the health and well-being of civilians.

There is much more to be done to implement resolution 2286 (2016), and to that end the United Arab Emirates is committed to protecting health care in armed conflict in three ways.

First, we are committed to building the United Arab Emirates capacity to uphold international humanitarian law, and, as part of these efforts, a national committee for international humanitarian law was recently established to disseminate the fundamentals of international humanitarian law and ensure implementation.

Secondly, the United Arab Emirates is committed to advancing my country's partnerships with the United Nations and support for humanitarian organizations on the ground in Yemen and elsewhere. Collaboration is especially crucial during outbreaks of disease, as was seen in the recent outbreak of cholera in Yemen.

Thirdly, we are committed to continuing our work in elevating women in the design and delivery of health care and humanitarian relief. The United Arab Emirates commends the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action and in its advancement of a gender-sensitive approach to medical care. However, the United Arab Emirates recommends that the Standing Committee consider including UN-Women among its members. Member States must work to address the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and children, and not enough is being done to coordinate this objective.

Mr. President, I thank Uruguay for its leadership and wish you continued success for the remainder of your presidency.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Mr. Barros Melet (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Chile thanks the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay and his country for convening and presiding over today's debate on medical care in situations of armed conflict.

Our country aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the Human Security Network, of which we are a member.

Schools and hospitals are zones of peace that must be respected by all parties to a conflict. Attacks against hospitals are all the more cruel as they harm the population while leaving it without medical care, which is a vital resource for any society. The World Humanitarian Summit and the Agenda for Humanity reaffirmed that the protection of the civilian population in armed conflict should be a priority and, in accordance with resolution 2286 (2016), we reiterate the responsibility that is incumbent upon the parties as well as the importance of taking action in this regard.

We condemn the attacks and threats of attacks against schools and hospitals and against protected persons associated with them, the closing of schools and hospitals in situations of armed conflict as a result thereof, and the storage of weapons in these facilities and their use for military purposes, endangering the civilian population and the personnel who work in them. We call on all parties to a conflict, without distinction, to cease such attacks and refrain from actions that would obstruct access to health and education services, pursuant to resolution 2143 (2014). That is why we support the prevention, protection and accountability measures proposed in the reports of the Secretary-General.

In terms of immediate measures, we insist on including the protection of health and medical facilities in ceasefire agreements and post-conflict agendas, and we must train the various actors in this regard. It is also essential to move forward in prevention, by harmonizing national legislation with international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions and their optional Protocols, and we must train all those to whom the laws and standards apply.

We must also ensure that decisions on foreign policy, including those related to the sale and transfer of weapons, respect the provision of medical care in conflicts. Member States and parties to a conflict must take precautions to safeguard medical facilities and personnel in planning and carrying out military operations, including through advance warnings and evacuations, among other things. To this end, the action of security and development bodies on the ground should be coordinated with national authorities, including health authorities. Drawing up registries of health facilities and statistics is crucial in order to implement these measures. The World Health Organization can play an important role in guiding this work.

We must continue to make efforts in the fight against impunity, urging all parties, as well as humanitarian actors, to work together to shed light on these crimes. In accordance with resolution 1998 (2011), which was co-sponsored by my country, we ask the Secretary-General to include, in the annexes to his reports on children and armed conflict, all parties to armed conflicts without any distinction who, in contravention of international law, carry out attacks against schools or hospitals. We hope that the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, will enjoy the necessary support to carry out this task.

We reiterate the need to strengthen cooperation with civil society in this context, as was underscored by the Council in its 2015 presidential statement on inclusive development (S/PRST/2015/3), and we await with interest those proposals. Both the Council and its subsidiary bodies should pay particular attention to the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) and take it into account in their deliberations and outcomes.

In conclusion, we extend our solidarity to the victims and to the civilians affected by these attacks and we express our gratitude to all the actors dedicated to their protection, including civil society, and their efforts in this area.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I wish to thank Uruguay and congratulate Foreign Minister Nin Novoa on organizing this debate. I would like to thank the Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Deputy Executive Director of Human Rights Watch for their briefings.

We thank the Secretary-General for his first report on this subject (S/2017/414) and we value his recommendations and description of the three protection priorities. Again, we must regret the fact that, according to this report, civilians continue to constitute the majority of victims of conflicts. The lack of distinction between combatants and civilians results in civilians being killed, wounded and displaced, and in situations in which there are serious impediments to and even attacks on access to humanitarian assistance.

It is therefore necessary for the Security Council to remain committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict through the promotion of full respect for international law, in particular respect for international humanitarian law, international human rights and refugee law, as well as the fight against impunity. In this context, it is imperative to recall the obligations arising from the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Additional Protocols, the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, human rights and refugee law and customary international law.

It is also necessary to continue to include and strengthen civil protection activities in the mandates of United Nations field missions. In that regard and in line with the recommendation of the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446), which was also recognized in the reports of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, we understand that the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations is an integrated effort across the mission which requires, as a first essential measure, close cooperation between military, police and civilian components, in coordination with local Governments and communities and humanitarian organizations in the field.

With regard to humanitarian assistance, parties to a conflict must make every effort to ensure effective and timely access to humanitarian action, including cargo and materials. Such assistance enjoys special protection under international humanitarian law, and it is therefore a matter of concern that, in many situations, there are obstacles to access to humanitarian assistance or in some cases access is even denied.

Under international humanitarian law and the Security Council's resolutions, attacks of any kind on civilians, schools, cultural property and places of worship, as well as obstructing access to humanitarian assistance, constitute a violation of international law. We regret that, one year after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), we must reiterate that medical and hospital personnel cannot be targeted, and we condemn the numerous cases in which this has occurred. We also express our gratitude and support for the recommendation of the Secretary-General to accede to the Safe Schools Declaration, in support of which my country had the honour of organizing the second international conference in March in Buenos Aires.

The Security Council must remain committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including by considering particular situations, as it has done for children, women or journalists; continue to promote respect for international law; and put an end to impunity for perpetrators of grave violations against civilians. In this regard, Argentina believes that there is a preventive role for accountability mechanisms. Impartial mechanisms are essential to investigating violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. In this connection, I would highlight the work of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission provided for in Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

Also, with regard to the need to strengthen accountability for perpetrators of heinous crimes, Argentina wishes to emphasize the role of the International Criminal Court. In particular, we recall that, according to its Statute, the Court has jurisdiction over attacks on medical personnel, hospitals and places where the sick and injured are assembled, and on medical buildings, equipment, units and means of transport. States parties to the Rome Statute need to adopt appropriate standards to that end, and the cooperation of all States with the Court is essential.

The existing legal framework for the protection of civilians should be translated into concrete results on the ground. The Council should strengthen its efforts to explore how best to do so.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Gone (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate the Uruguayan presidency of the Security Council on organizing this high-level public debate on the issue of the protection of civilians and medical care in conflict. I also congratulate Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Deputy Executive Director of Human Rights Watch for their briefings. Their various reports, which are very exhaustive and based on observations from the field, shed light for us without reservation and challenge our collective conscience on the need to join our efforts to strengthen the protection of vulnerable people and of those who are entitled to special protection.

My delegation would also like to take the opportunity that today's debate affords to pay tribute to the commitment of humanitarian actors, especially

those who have paid with their lives in performing their duties.

In spite of the fact that international humanitarian law obliges us to distinguish between civilians and combatants and to respect and protect medical and humanitarian personnel and their equipment and facilities, it is clear that, far from diminishing, efforts to hinder humanitarian action, attack medical personnel physically and destroy hospitals are still continuing and are often accompanied by unspeakable atrocities. As many speakers before me have pointed out, these represent serious violations of humanitarian law that remind us that it is more urgent than ever to mobilize the international community and to act, including through coercion.

With its adoption a year ago of resolution 2286 (2016), the Security Council marked an important stage in the readiness of the United Nations and the international community to meet the challenge of protecting medical personnel and infrastructure in areas affected by conflict. My delegation welcomes that progress and has also noted with interest the Secretary-General's recommendations for measures that should be taken in that regard. From now on, the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, resolutions 1894 (2009) and 2286 (2016), along with previous resolutions and the many multilateral instruments that have been adopted to date, will provide us with solid benchmarks for effectively preventing and ending any violations of humanitarian, human rights or refugee law.

In my delegation's view, the major challenge continues to be ensuring that States take on board and implement these various documents effectively. In that context, my delegation would like to make some recommendations. The first is that we should strengthen the promotion of international humanitarian law. More often than not, many of the violations committed in conflict situations occur out of the total ignorance of the parties involved of their obligations. We believe that strengthening the promotion of humanitarian law could considerably reduce the frequency and extent of such violations. That involves training defence and security forces in the basic principles of international humanitarian law, with particular emphasis on protecting civilians and medical personnel in conflict-affected areas. That has been a goal of the security-sector reform that Côte d'Ivoire has been conducting since the end of the 2011 post-election crisis, with the valuable support of the United Nations system and bilateral partners. The challenge has been to transform the army into a body imbued with the basic principles of humanitarian law and focused on serving development and the protection of civilians. The same objective guides the Ivorian authorities in training contingents for United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Our second challenge is aligning national legislation with international legal norms related to preventing and ending violations of humanitarian law. It is impossible to effectively protect civilians and medical personnel and infrastructure without aligning national legislation with international norms. States must therefore acquire the necessary capacity to enable them to deal with all cases of violations of international humanitarian law in accordance with internationally recognized and accepted legal standards.

Recognizing the major instruments governing the area, de facto and de jure, continues to be one of the basic steps in achieving that. To that end, my country, which considers international law extremely important, is party to the principal international instruments in the areas of international humanitarian law and human rights, including the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and its Additional Protocols I and II, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, and the Rome Statute.

The third and last challenge is combating impunity. Many speakers in today's debate have emphasized that the abuses and crimes committed against humanitarian workers have for the most part gone unpunished. That makes it all the more crucial to ensure that all States, and conflicting parties in particular, fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law, especially where bringing the perpetrators of such unacceptable crimes before the competent jurisdiction is concerned.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Grant (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Since today we are considering the suffering of civilians who have been harmed or displaced by conflict, we take this opportunity to emphasize the urgency need to help the more than 20 million people who are currently facing famine, in large part thanks to conflicts that have been permitted to continue without consequences and to restrictions imposed on humanitarian access. Canada commends the Council for its adoption last year of

resolution 2286 (2016), which requires all parties to armed conflicts to comply fully with their obligation to ensure that all medical personnel are respected and protected, and to facilitate safe and unimpeded passage for them and their supplies. That sense of initiative is vital, and the Council has received broad support from the international community. More than 80 States, including Canada, sponsored the resolution, demonstrating that this is an issue that resonates deeply.

Today, we are dealing with the grim fact that attacks on medical facilities in some conflict areas have become so commonplace that hospitals have to be fortified to protect them from bombs and artillery shells, while some have actually had to be moved underground, even into caves, in order to protect them from constant bombardments. Moreover, when civilians are violently and even purposely deprived of the health care that is crucial to their survival and that of their communities, it undermines all of our efforts to protect those under threat.

(*spoke in English*)

We also acknowledge that this constant violence poses an additional global threat — that of complacency. We run the risk that people will lose hope; indeed, we have already seen the consequences of that in the global refugee crisis. Reinforcing our well-established norms requires determined leadership, and Canada is taking the following steps in that regard.

First, together with Switzerland, we are proud to be the co-Chair of an informal group of States, based in Geneva, to promote the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), thereby providing States with an opportunity to collaborate on advocacy and promote best practices.

Secondly, we have continued to condemn attacks targeting civilians, medical personnel and health-care facilities. Canada worked in the General Assembly last year to focus attention on the critical situation in Syria, including by taking the lead on General Assembly resolution 71/130, adopted on 9 December, which condemned attacks on civilians and humanitarian and medical personnel. We urge the Council to clearly condemn direct and indiscriminate attacks and to continue to demand that parties to conflicts comply with their obligations.

Thirdly, Canada is fully committed to ensuring that the perpetrators of such crimes, and those who do not respect international law, are held accountable. For instance, in the context of Syria, Canada is supporting and funding evidence collection and documentation efforts.

Fourthly, Canada's obligations under international humanitarian law are embedded in Canadian Armed Forces doctrine and predeployment training, which we believe is a crucial step that States must undertake. We urge countries to examine their national legislative frameworks and consider signing the relevant international treaties and guidelines for enhancing the protection of civilians. Those include the Arms Trade Treaty, to which Canada is currently in the process of acceding. Canada has also recently endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, reaffirming our commitment to protect children affected by armed conflict.

Member States and the Council must address persistent violations of international humanitarian law and end the pervasive climate of impunity. The Council has important tools for ensuring accountability and must use them more consistently. We encourage all Member States to consider the Secretary-General's positive recommendations. Canada will continue to lead efforts to enhance the protection of civilians.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ireland.

Mr. Mawe (Ireland): I thank you, Sir, for convening today's debate. Ireland aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the Human Security Network.

In my national capacity, I wish to situate my brief remarks in the broader context of sustaining peace. The Security Council and, indeed, the entire United Nations system was established not to mitigate the effects of conflict, but to deal with threats and risks to peace in order to prevent them from breaking out into full-scale conflict. We commend Secretary- General Guterres for emphasizing the primacy of peace and for placing conflict prevention at the core of his mandate. We were also glad to see all United Nations Member States come together, with the backing of the Council, to adopt an innovative resolution on sustaining peace in April of last year (General Assembly resolution 70/262). Preventing and ending conflicts must be at the top of our agenda as the most effective means to protect civilians.

Unfortunately, we are compelled to focus on the many conflicts currently being fought. Today, there are more people in conflict-related humanitarian need than we have seen since the end of the Second World War. Much of that is caused not by the mere existence of conflict, but by violations by conflict parties of their duties and obligations — most of which arise from international customary law. Those are not accidents, but deliberate decisions by parties to conflict.

We absolutely condemn attacks on medical and health care facilities. We do so without qualification or reserve. Not only are parties to conflicts reneging on their obligations to ensure, in their military planning and operations, the protection of hospitals and other civilian facilities, they are engaging in deliberate and repeated attacks. We commend the Security Council for responding to that egregious trend by adopting resolution 2286 (2016) in May of last year, which underlines the obligations of parties to armed conflict to comply with international humanitarian and international human rights law to protect health care infrastructure and personnel.

The growing trend of attacks on humanitarian workers is also a cause of grave concern. We heard yesterday in this Chamber (see S/PV.7950) that 17 aid workers have been killed in South Sudan this year alone and we are not yet in the month of June. Moreover, the politicization and militarization of humanitarian aid is unacceptable. Access to food, water and medical care cannot be denied in an attempt by a conflict party to gain military advantage. Similarly, we reject the use of humanitarian access as a bargaining chip in peace negotiations, as well as the attempted tit-for-tat agreements we have seen regarding medical evacuations in Syria.

We support the critical role of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which works to coordinate and protect those on the ground who are often putting their lives at risk to access and assist victims of conflict. We thank the ICRC for using its voice to remind States and other parties to armed conflicts of their legal obligations under international humanitarian law, as has been done today by the Vice-President of the ICRC, Ms. Beerli.

Ireland wishes to direct the Council's attention also to the issue of civilian harm from the conduct of hostilities in urban areas, particularly through the use of cluster munitions. Last year, when explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 92 per cent of those killed and injured were civilians. The immediate effects are clear; we have heard accounts in this Chamber of the destructive aftermath in cities in Yemen, Syria and many other places. What we often do not hear about is the longer-term effect — the stagnation of economic, social and environmental development, or the harm and injury caused by explosive remnants long after the initial conflict has ceased.

We therefore support the recommendation of the Secretary-General for States to engage constructively in efforts to develop a political declaration to address the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We also urge all States to accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and the Arms Trade Treaty. Illegal and irresponsible arms transfers to conflict regions must be stopped.

Finally, when discussing the issue of the protection of civilians we must also highlight the particular challenges faced by women and children. Ireland is supporting a civil society-led study to explore the specific risks faced by women and girls following forced displacement caused by explosive weapons in populated areas.

Let us be clear. We are making lowest common denominator calls today. We are asking that States and non-State actors alike adhere to the rules and norms that bind them to protecting civilians who have nothing to do with the conflict happening around them. As we have seen today in the Secretary-General's report, this is simply not happening. What is more, perpetrators are not being held accountable. If the Organization and the Council are to remain effective and relevant they must take the measures necessary to ensure that everyone adheres to the most basic threshold of humanity.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): I am delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country, Norway. I will not read out the full statement.

As highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/414), recent armed conflicts have seen State and non-State armed groups defying international law

by directly targeting civilians and civilian objects. That has led to indescribable acts of violence and brutality and caused human suffering and carnage on an unprecedented scale.

The backdrop for our current debate is the one-year anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) on health care in armed conflict. The resolution sent a resounding message. The wounded and sick, medical and humanitarian personnel, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities, must be respected and protected. States are responsible for implementing resolution 2286 (2016). That requires putting in place the requisite legal and operational measures. The Nordic countries are committed to the Secretary-General's recommendations on implementing resolution 2286 (2016). We call on all Member States to do the same.

Attacks against medical personal must be understood as part of a broader trend where civilians increasingly are subjected to attacks in armed conflict and that becomes a tactic of war. Our common resolve to confront such acts must be unequivocal. There are no simple solutions. Our response must be carefully calibrated and effective. Let me emphasize seven points of particular importance.

First, we must ensure full respect for international law, especially humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. International law protects the delivery of humanitarian aid; providing medical care, it mandates the protection of refugees, displaced persons and migrants and protects civilians from harm. Compliance with international law is therefore paramount. We remain committed to the joint initiative on the part of Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross on strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law.

We must enhance respect for international law by the parties to armed conflict. This requires that we understand the changing nature of conflict. Armed conflicts are increasingly being fought in urban areas with devastating consequences for civilians. We share the concern of the Secretary-General and call on State and non-State parties to armed conflicts to prevent civilian harm resulting from the use of wide-area explosive weapons in populated areas.

Second, we must ensure that those who violate international law are held accountable. If States are unwilling or unable to prosecute such crimes, they must be referred to the International Criminal Court.

Third, parties to a conflict must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief. The international community must unequivocally condemn and take effective measures against attacks on health care personnel and facilities. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Health Care in Danger initiative should be universally supported.

Fourth, we must meet the humanitarian challenges posed by the historically high number of irregular migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons. Our humanitarian response must be effective, efficient and fully able to meet urgent humanitarian needs and promote sustainable solutions.

Fifth, States must fulfil their responsibility to protect children from armed conflict and take action to address violations and abuses. That includes protecting the right to education and schools from attacks. Our children deserve the right to pursue a better future through education, even when their grown-ups cannot make peace. We urge all States to join the Safe Schools Declaration, now endorsed by 65 Member States.

Sixth, we must recognize that gender equality and women's participation are critical to peaceful societies. We must actively involve women in political and economic decision-making. Women and men must be heard and respected equally.

Seventh and finally, we must address the root causes of conflict, violent extremism and terrorism. That entails ensuring respect for human rights, upholding the rule of law and striving for sustainable development and socioeconomic opportunities without discrimination of any groups.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Laassel (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate, marking the first anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), which Morocco co-sponsored. We also commend the other nations behind that initiative that submitted the draft to the Security Council alongside Uruguay, namely, Spain, Egypt, New Zealand and Japan. Our thanks also go to the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch for their presentations this morning.

The subject chosen for today's debate is a call on us all. In recent years, there has been a worrying

increase in attacks on humanitarian personnel and medical facilities during periods of armed conflict. It is important that the Security Council, as well as all United Nations members, be able to reiterate the strong signal sent last year on the vital importance of respecting international humanitarian law and protecting civilians. In that regard, I should like to point to resolution 2286 (2016), which strongly condemns intentional attacks on medical facilities or any equipment bearing the distinctive emblems of the Geneva Conventions, and which qualifies such attacks as war crimes.

Several reports have described attacks or incidents involving medical infrastructure or personnel in 23 countries in 2016. Beyond the failure to respect the basic principles of international law, including international human rights law, and international humanitarian law in particular, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the additional protocols thereto of 1977, attacks on medical infrastructure and personnel have serious direct consequences. The following are some examples.

The first is the suspension of health programmes. In many cases, attacks have resulted in the withdrawal of humanitarian organizations that could no longer ensure the security of their property and personnel. This situation primarily affects civilian populations already in situations of vulnerability due to conflict and that greatly need health services. For example, in the Central African Republic — where more than half of the population is dependent on humanitarian assistance — many non-governmental organizations have had to cease their activities because of the violence they have suffered, depriving people of assistance when they most need it. This example can be seen increasingly in many conflict-affected areas.

The second example is the degradation of existing infrastructure. Some countries currently in crisis once had functional health infrastructure, but because they are subject to attacks or because fighting is taking place in the vicinity, those facilities are no longer able to operate at full capacity, even as needs increase. That leads to a worrying phenomenon — the flight of skilled medical personnel. Figures show that two-thirds of specialized personnel have fled Syria. That gives an idea of the magnitude of the problem.

In other countries where basic infrastructure is lacking, clashes delay or nullify efforts to build or rehabilitate health facilities. Morocco, which had pledged to rehabilitate the university hospital of Bangui in the Central African Republic, had to wait several years before it could complete the rehabilitation work. Indeed, it was impossible to finalize the work at the height of the crisis, between 2012 and 2014, mainly because of recurring looting in the country.

It is clear that despite the considerable legal arsenal set up for the protection of civilians in the event of conflict, the international community has failed to eradicate this phenomenon and to address the serious difficulties related to attacks on medical infrastructure and personnel, whether those are ensuring the access of humanitarian personnel to civilian populations, bringing to justice those responsible for attacks or simply collecting reliable data. Today, these difficulties are growing due to the increase in attacks by terrorist groups. In Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Mali and many other countries, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Boko Haram and other terrorist groups are now deliberately targeting medical infrastructure and personnel.

Firm measures should be taken in this regard. As a first step, the relevant recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2016/722) following the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) should be implemented. Our first preventive measure should be to ensure respect for international law. It is by investing in prevention and strengthening democracy, the rule of law, as well as development, that we can limit the impact of conflicts, especially on medical personnel and, from there, on civilian populations.

For quite some time, the Kingdom of Morocco has integrated the teaching of international humanitarian law into the training curriculum of the Royal Armed Forces. Its provisions are an integral part of the rules of engagement of our armed forces. Moroccan contingents also benefit from this training before being deployed.

With a long tradition of deploying rural hospitals in crisis theatres, Morocco takes very seriously the threats to infrastructure and health personnel in times of armed conflict. My country has deployed its most recent field hospitals to Juba, South Sudan. In addition, Morocco has set up a hospital in the Zaatari refugee camp, where hundreds of thousands of people have been treated since 2012. In the past, the Royal Armed Forces have deployed hospitals in Kosovo and Somalia. Generally, the equipment used is offered as a gift at the end of the mission. Currently, Morocco is deploying a level-II hospital under the United Nations banner within the

United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Morocco shares the Secretary-General's firm conviction that the protection of civilian populations requires the implementation of the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law. The Kingdom of Morocco takes this opportunity provided by this debate to pay homage to those who are active in protecting civilians in conflict zones and expresses its sympathy to all the humanitarian actors and Blue Helmets who have paid with their lives for their commitment to the serve in United Nations operational deployment areas.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Ms. Pucarinho (Portugal): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and Uruguay for organizing this very important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, with a special focus on medical care.

Portugal aligns itself with the statements delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on Protection of Civilians. I would like to add some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Portugal welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/414), which contains relevant information on the implementation of the resolutions adopted by this Council on protection of civilians, in particular resolution 2286 (2016). Since the adoption of that resolution one year ago, the situation of civilians in a number of conflict-affected countries, some of those on the Council's agenda, has deteriorated. Civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in situations of armed conflict, and are continuously exposed to violence, being the primary victims of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

International law requires schools and hospitals to be treated as sanctuaries, yet these facilities are often among the most dangerous places to be in conflict-affected countries. Facilities continue to be used systematically for military purposes before our eyes that. They are deliberately targeted, overexposing civilians, especially children and young people, to violence. It is obvious to us all how schools and hospitals play a crucial role in conflict zones, as they are part of the most critical infrastructure to mitigate the effects of any armed conflict, particularly those involving mass casualties. We cannot stress enough the need to protect and promote the human right to health care in conflict, and we will continue to draw the Council's attention to that critical issue. I would also like to specifically mention the importance of ensuring adequate health care to those who are more vulnerable, including in the area of mental health.

With regard to health-care providers — those crucial humanitarian agents in conflict situations — we have seen them attacked. We have seen ambulances held up at checkpoints, hospitals bombed, medical supplies looted and entire communities cut off from critical services. Violence against health-care workers, facilities and vehicles is a humanitarian issue with a broad and multiplier, long-term effect.

The environment for humanitarian action faces a number of challenges that are contributing to the shrinking of the humanitarian space and jeopardizing the protection of civilians, which is required under international humanitarian law and human rights obligations. Regrettably, in some instances humanitarian access has been deliberately blocked, often due to political considerations or alleged security-related concerns. The duty to prevent and address acts of violence, attacks and threats against medical care in armed conflict must be honoured and respected. We must collectively act to ensure that those in need can enjoy medical care. In that regard, civil society organizations also should be mentioned, as they play an essential role in providing medical care to people affected by conflicts throughout the world. Working in close collaboration with them therefore often becomes indispensable to enhance assistance to those in need.

The failure to stop violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses, which may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes, also highlights the importance of prioritizing prevention and fighting impunity. It can be done only by ensuring accountability and the systematic and impartial investigations of reported violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law, including attacks against medical convoys and personnel. The responsibility of ensuring the protection of human rights and respect for international humanitarian law lies primarily with Member States. However, if national authorities fail to take the necessary measures in that regard, the Security Council can accordingly play a more active role. In that regard, the International

Criminal Court remains, in our opinion, a key venue in the fight against impunity for the most serious violations of international humanitarian law and plays a complementary role to those of tribunals at the national and international levels.

In recent decades, there has been undeniable progress in integrating a component of the protection of civilians into the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping missions. However, United Nations missions increasingly struggle to fulfil their mandates and protect their own personnel and innocent civilians on the ground. That trend must be reversed, and to that end it is necessary that, among other tools, United Nations missions be provided with modern and flexible capabilities, including a human rights component, which contributes to enhancing the performance of peacekeeping operations.

In that regard, I wish to mention very briefly the recent experience of members of the Portuguese national force in their role as a quick reaction force in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. Acting without caveats, that force has recently been involved in the protection of civilians in the area around Bangassou, where it strengthened the Mission's decisive efforts to secure and protect civilians seeking refuge from the threat of armed groups at a local hospital and mosque and the Saint Peter Clavel Cathedral. Portugal reiterates its pledge to continue conducting training programmes for national personnel and members of the armed security forces assigned to international peacekeeping missions.

In conclusion, we believe that only a coherent and long-term approach based on addressing root causes, increasing political diplomacy for prevention and conflict resolution and bringing humanitarian development and peacebuilding efforts together can effectively strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law, promote accountability for perpetrators, improve humanitarian access to those in need, strengthen the international response to global massive displacements and build sustainable peace. The dignity and value of a human being must be at the core of a shift from perpetual reaction to early action.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): First of all, I would like to commend your delegation, Sir, for taking the initiative of convening this open debate on the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict, and for submitting a concept note (S/2017/365, annex) on the topic.

We also take note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/414) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and its recommendations.

Despite the important preventive and protection efforts that have been undertaken at the national and international levels, numerous challenges remain and civilians continue to suffer in situations of armed conflict. Azerbaijan strongly condemns all attacks against civilians, including attacks against the wounded and sick, medical and humanitarian personnel, hospitals, other medical facilities and humanitarian convoys. Efforts to prevent and resolve conflict and strengthen respect for international law have acquired importance today. As a matter of priority, special attention should be given to the implementation of resolutions adopted by the principal organs of the United Nations, in particular those relating to the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflict prevention and resolution.

Furthermore, the increasing brutality of armed conflicts and the changing nature of warfare have given rise to the need for greater measures for protection, including with regard to the humanitarian and medical mission. A critical element in that context is accountability for enhancing compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. Resolute and targeted measures are required to that end. Such measures must be free of selectivity and politically motivated approaches, however difficult or even unrealistic that may seem. Impunity for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community contributes to instability and prevents the development of lasting solutions and the achievement of sustainable peace.

When national authorities fail to take the necessary steps to ensure accountability, the international community, particularly the Security Council, should play a more proactive role so as to ensure an appropriate response, including through support for national prosecutions, the establishment of ad hoc tribunals, hybrid mechanisms, international commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions. It is important that peace efforts never encourage, accept or tolerate situations achieved through the unlawful use of force and other egregious violations of international law,

such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Special attention must be given to the protection of civilians forced to leave their homes as a result of armed conflict. Azerbaijan supports continuing efforts to raise awareness of the problem of internal displacement and the right of return at the national and international levels. In that regard, we welcome the call of the Secretary-General on Member States to intensify efforts to tackle the root causes of forced displacement by preventing and resolving conflicts and strengthening respect for international law, including in protracted conflict.

My country's familiarity with the suffering of civilians in armed conflict is not based on hearsay. The continuing aggression of Armenia against my country has led to the temporary occupation of a significant part of Azerbaijan's territory, including the Nagorno Karabakh region, the seven adjacent districts and some exclaves. The war has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people and ruined cities and livelihoods in my country. Serious violations of international humanitarian law amounting to war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide were committed by the Armenian side in the course of the aggression. Such violations include, inter alia, deliberate attacks against hospitals, schools, places of worship and other civilian objects, the killing of civilians, the taking and holding of hostages, the mistreatment and summary execution of prisoners of war and hostages, sexual violence, the extensive destruction of inhabited areas and public and private property, pillaging and forced displacement.

The impunity still enjoyed by the perpetrators of the crimes committed in the course of the Armenian aggression not only impedes progress in achieving long-awaited peace and reconciliation between the two countries, but also aggravates the already difficult situation in the peace process. Moreover, despite the formal ceasefire, deliberate attacks against Azerbaijani civilians and civilian objects have become more frequent and more violent in recent times. Azerbaijan will spare no effort towards ending the unlawful occupation of its territories, achieving the political settlement of the conflict and ensuring peace and justice in the region.

In conclusion, we believe that it is essential that the Security Council consistently maintain its focus on the protection of civilians and systematically reiterate its demand that all parties to armed conflict comply fully with their obligations under international law.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.